

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University South Bend, in
partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of
Liberal Studies.

MAMA'S JOURNEY HOME: A DAUGHTER'S STORY

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree
Master of Liberal Studies
in the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences,
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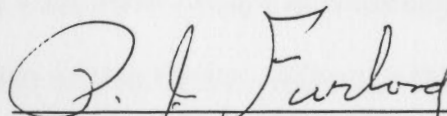
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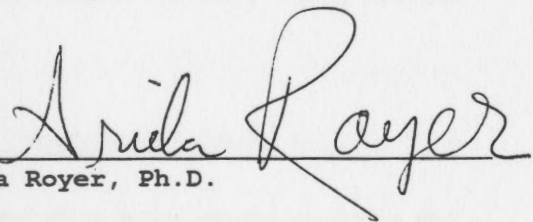
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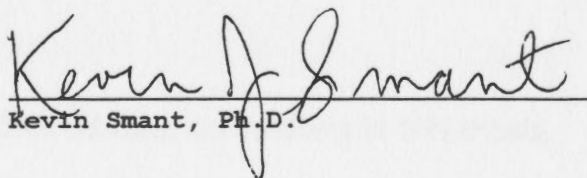
Dedicated to Creston and Allene Bruce—Dad and Mom—as promised long ago.



Patrick J. Furlong, Ph.D.
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Date of Oral Examination

October 12, 1998

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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It is with great pleasure--and, dare I say relief--that I acknowledge those who have encouraged me in the completion of this thesis. Although this was a labor of love from the beginning, even love could not keep me on track all of the time. The people in my life--family and friends, peers and mentors--have backed me every step of the way.

First, of course, I must thank my parents, Creston and Allene Bruce. It is their exceptional intelligence, morality, and support that have made possible the completion of this--my life's dream. To begin with, because they did without in order that I finish college, I earned a bachelor's degree from Western Michigan University in 1965.

Their support made possible my further studies, culminating in this thesis, which is dedicated to them. As a child, I told Mama that I would write her life story. It took years of maturing, learning, and experience, but that story is finally a reality. There were times--many of them--when the thesis had to take a back seat to other life commitments. However, it was never a burden to study and then write about the era in which my parents began their adult life. Thank you, Mama and Dad for everything.

There are relatives to thank for their loving support: my grandmothers, Mattie Ophelia Latimer Ledford and Clara Risk Kersey Bruce, both of whom taught me so much about dignity in the face of personal struggles; my uncles Joseph D. Ledford and Harry Bruce. From I admire a great deal--who gave me their time and attention when I drove to Missouri in 1996 for a visit.

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career and work on my master's degree. Knowing her has made a difference in my life. Thank you, Jacquie.

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There are many others--too numerous to list--both at the university and in my personal life whose warm, supporting comments have often meant the difference between more procrastination or getting back to work. Thanks to all--your friendship means a great deal to me.

Prologue

Mama begins her train trip to Michigan

Chapter Two

Chapter Four The move to Grand Haven, Michigan

Chapter Five The move to Grand Haven, Michigan

Chapter Six The Bruce family settles in

Chapter Seven The Bruce family settles in

Epilogue A trip to Missouri in 1996

Appendix A Maps

Appendix B Genealogical Record

Appendix C Illustrations

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue	
Missouri Memories.....	vii
Chapter One	
Mama begins her train trip to Michigan.....	1
Chapter Two	
Mama's family and the Great Depression.....	12
Chapter Three	
Mama meets Creston J. Bruce (Dad).....	28
Chapter Four	
Dad's family.....	38
Chapter Five	
The move to Grand Haven, Michigan.....	44
Chapter Six	
The Bruce family settles in.....	54
PROLOGUE	
Epilogue	
A trip to Missouri in 1996.....	67
Appendix A	
Maps.....	74
Appendix B	
Genealogical Record.....	78
Appendix C	
Illustrations.....	85

slip into it so easily. Oblivious to the true reason for their dismay, I simply enjoyed singing about Missouri.

As a child, Missouri was a special place for me, filled with loving relatives and interesting sights, so totally different from Grand Haven, Michigan, where I lived. My brother Gary, although born ten years later than I, was nevertheless also taken with the uniqueness of Missouri. He loved the trips south so much that, his freshman year, he joined his Missouri cousins at Mississippi State University, where cousin Kenny Bruce was already a junior. The fact that he transferred the next year to Michigan State University did not alter his fond memories of Missouri, a state that has somehow left its mark on all who have gone in search of greener pastures. As Manley O. Hudson said in his 1923 essay, "Missouri: doesn't want to

PROLOGUE

Missouri is not merely a geographers' diagram. It is not simply a place. It is a state of emotion. It is a set of convictions. It is a start on life. In brief, it is a civilization.

Missouri is a state of mind. There's a song that goes, "Missouri, I hear you calling me", that I used to sing with a heavy twang in my voice, much to the chagrin of my parents. I reserved the impish behavior for those long, boring auto trips south to visit the relatives (See map 1, Appendix A). My mother's consternation arose from the fact that they had both sacrificed a great deal to pay for my voice, piano and dancing lessons. In spite of the fact that they grew up in Missouri, they had never spoken with a southern drawl or the slightest trace of a twang. Therefore, they found it unnerving to hear their oldest child

¹ Manley O. Hudson, "Missouri: Doesn't Want to Be Shown," In *These United States: portraits of America from the 1820's*, ed. Daniel H. Boorstin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 205.

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Missouri is not merely a geographers' diagram. It is not simply a place. It is a state of digestion. It is a set of conventions. It is a slant on life. In brief, it is a civilization.¹

In 1923, my mama was a child in Steele, Missouri. Old worn black-and-white photographs show a tiny girl with dark curly hair, dark eyes and a somber expression on her face. She and her sister Rachel (eighteen months younger than Mama) are seated on a bench in the photographer's studio (See Illustration 1, Appendix C). Mama says that she probably didn't smile because she'd just been told to sit still "or else." The fact was that Lois Allene Ledford was already

¹ Manley O. Hudson, "Missouri: Doesn't Want to Be Shown." In *These United States: portraits of America from the 1920's*, ed. Daniel H. Borus. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 205.

the oldest of three, and three more siblings were to follow. Her father was William Lancaster "Doc" Ledford, also with brown hair and eyes, and of small stature. Her mother was Mattie Ophelia "Matt" Latimer Ledford, a woman who was taller than her husband by at least three inches, had blue eyes and with what most people considered beautiful red hair.

Ten years after that picture, in 1933, the country was sliding deeper and deeper into the Great Depression. And, twenty years after the picture, in 1943, America was at war in Europe and in the Pacific. Thirty-plus years after her childhood picture, in 1953, my mama was caring for me, my new-born brother, Gary Jonathan, and, of course, Dad, in Grand Haven, Michigan. Now, more than seventy years later, she and Dad are together in St. Joseph, Michigan, and are the grandparents of four.

To their children and grandchildren, they are much more than pictures in a family album. They are the personification of strength and endurance, of pride and compassion, and of good humor and family ties. The ties that bind; in their case, the ties are the roots they put down in a new state and the values that keep their little family together. This is the story of how my mama left Missouri and found Michigan. My brother, Gary, says, "I'm glad they got us out of Missouri—that was one huge favor, right there."

² Lawrence O. Christensen, "Missouri: The Heart of the Nation," in *Heartland*, ed. James H. Madison (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

In *Heartland*, Lawrence O. Christensen says that, "One historian recently described Missouri as 'a bewildering blend of geography, humanity, and events.' He added, 'I am the first to confess that Missouri is difficult to understand.'"²

Although I've lived in Michigan and Indiana most of my life, and my brother Gary was born in Michigan, Missouri is never far from our minds. It's sort of like a dream to me--of flat, black fields, hot sun beating down, playing in the barn, putting cotton bolls in a sack to take back to the northern school for "show and tell"; aunts and uncles moving and talking so slowly, they seemed to be a video run at a lesser speed. A dream of kind faces, enveloping hugs, screen doors slamming, huge electric fans roaring at night, and the smell of earth freshly soaked with rain. The dream includes seeing the relatives in the kitchen, platters full of food, ice cubes clinking in tall glasses and cousins who were nearly strangers, yet seemed somehow very familiar. Even as children, we could feel that this was not just a friend's house—this was family. There was a familiarity that Mama had with her brothers and sisters that we never saw her display with another soul—ever.

Missouri is so deeply embedded in my psyche that the sound of the word brings on an overwhelming feeling of security: of being covered at the end of a long hot day under a cool sheet and drifting off to sleep while the adults talk into the night. Even the strangeness of sharing a bed with cousin Myrana didn't keep

² Lawrence O. Christensen. "Missouri The Heart of the Nation," In *Heartland*, ed. James H. Madison (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988),

me from drifting off to sleep—everything was fine as long as I could hear my mama's voice.

In southeast Missouri are the lowlands, the Bootheel, with a more than two-hundred-day growing season producing cotton and soybeans. This great alluvial plain, a part of the Mississippi River valley, forms the eastern border of the state. The rich lands of the valley attracted early settlers as did the great Missouri River valley, which divides the state north and south, and provides its western border from Kansas City to the Iowa line.³

Because I told Mama when I was a child that someday I would write a story about her, this is the promised biography. I was very close to Mama and, in spite of adult disagreements, there is still a strong and affectionate bond. She spent many hours with me recounting the family history, names, and places. That, I'm sure, was the seed that grew into a love of history--I always felt connected to the people who came before me. They then connected me with the events of their time. If I could meet them today, I believe that I would feel comfortable with them--I would tell them that I know who they are and that I'm proud of the manner in which they persevered, and, of the heritage they gave me.

In order to write this story, I therefore began with at least a general knowledge of United States history, the American Civil War in particular, and an appreciation of how the modern world came to be. I then recorded my mother's thoughts as she answered my questions. For the record, I usually asked questions that I knew the answer to, but was often surprised when the answer

³ Christensen, *Missouri*, 88.

was more than I expected. She has always been an extremely private person; therefore, I know that these recordings were possible only because she continues to believe in me--she did it for my studies. I hope, too, that she agrees with me on the value of telling our descendants about the family members from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This paper is dedicated to my mother and father—the two people who not only gave me life, but did all in their power to raise me with love, education, and refinement.

Mama didn't know it yet, but her own trip north to Michigan turned out to be her journey home. She and Dad, through sheer determination, turned Michigan into the secure home they had both been seeking. In 1944, the United States was at war and my mama was on the move again. True grit had gotten her this far and this was not as far as she wanted to go. Mama's life before now had prepared her to handle tough situations and she knew for a fact that she did not want to stay in Missouri, where it was becoming obvious that jobs and hopes were fast fading away.

Although the rest of the country was in an industrial boom due to World War II, southeast Missouri did not have an industrial base.¹ Farming had always been the area's reason for being. And she was absolutely positive that she'd had enough farming to last a lifetime. There were jobs in Michigan, thanks to the auto industry having been transformed into war defense plants. Dad had gone ahead, found a job and an apartment and was waiting for Mama and me to join him.

¹ Ronald L. Filippelli, *Labor in the USA: A History* (New York: Knopf 1984), 206.

The early years of the United States, however, saw Missouri and the entire Mississippi River Valley area (See Map 1, Appendix A) as the land of opportunity.

When Missouri became a state in 1821 under the presidency of James Monroe, it was the southern boundary, known today as the "Boonwell", to be conformed. The Clear of the valley at that time was John Hardeman Walker.

CHAPTER ONE

Mama didn't know it yet, but her train trip north to Michigan turned out to be her journey home. She and Dad, through sheer determination, turned Michigan into the secure home they had both been seeking. In 1944, the United States was at war and my mama was on the move again. True grit had gotten her this far and this was not as far as she wanted to go. Mama's life before now had prepared her to handle tough situations and she knew for a fact that she did not want to stay in Missouri, where it was becoming obvious that jobs and hopes were fast fading away.

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¹ "History of Agriculture in the Bootheel of Missouri." Bootheel, Eastonville, Missouri, 1.

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The early years of the United States, however, saw Missouri and the entire Mississippi River Valley area (See Map 1, Appendix A) as the land of opportunity:

When Missouri became a state in 1821 under the presidency of James Monroe, it was agriculture that caused the southern boundary, known today as the "Bootheel", to be conformed. The Czar of the valley at that time was John Hardeman Walker, and his influence was potent enough that legislators listened to him persuade them that his farming land should all be in Missouri. He argued that the territory of Arkansas was sparsely populated and that statehood would not be granted them for several years to come, and that he needed his interests to all be where law and order would abound. Walker won; thus, agriculture is the reason the farmers of the Bootheel are in Missouri and not in Arkansas.²

Land speculators and the U.S. government brought about a financial crash called the "Panic of 1837" that drove settlers west across the Mississippi River in search of new fields. John Walker was an influential landowner in Southeast Missouri. Caruthersville, Pemiscot County seat, was laid out in 1857 by G. W. Bushey and the same John Walker: "Pemiscot County (was) no longer a land of 'liquid mud.'" Drainage districts, levee boards and good farming practices caused this county to be one of the richest farming areas in the nation.³

² "History of Agriculture in the Bootheel of Missouri." Brochure, Caruthersville, Missouri, 2.

³ "History of Pemiscot County." Brochure, Caruthersville, Missouri, 2.

Seventy years after the end of the American Civil War, most of the South was still slogging through the quicksand of poverty, struggling not to regain its former glory, but to simply feed and clothe its people.

1910- And when the war was no more, the regiment began the long march across the Smoky Mountains to Nashville, where they boarded steamboats for West Tennessee...The bridges along the East Tennessee railroads had been rebuilt ... the scars of war were evident at Knoxville and Chattanooga, yet the bustle of activity and factory smoke spoke of the new order.⁴

The southern United States, throughout the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, was thought to be a backward land, separate not only because of its past experiences, but because of how it viewed its role in the United States. For instance, mourning for the loss of the Confederate States of America persisted into this century. Many family's ancestors had fought for the South during the Civil War.

Grand My ancestors on my mama's side of the family, the Latimers, the Childers, the Borroughs, and the Ledfords were among the pioneers who moved west across the Appalachians as the new country expanded. Every couple of generations, another family would move further west, looking for better land (See Genealogy Records 1-6, Appendix B).

Mama Now, in the summer of 1944, a new generation was on the move--this time to the industrial North. There were many reasons for leaving Southeast Missouri, but the paramount one was probably economics. And once they

⁴ Thomas L. Connelly, *Civil War Tennessee*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979), 100.

arrived, they never looked back--they knew their opportunities awaited them in Michigan. According to Chad Berry in his Indiana University Doctoral dissertation, "Social Highways: Southern White Migration to the Midwest, 1910-1960:"

Overall data from the peak years of the Great White Migration--1945 to 1960--suggest both the volume of people involved, particularly from the Upland South, and the extent to which migration was an improvement in one's economic life.

Berry's dissertation seldom mentions the state of Missouri, but the reasons for leaving Missouri were the same as those states further south and east that Berry discusses. While my parents both had strong family ties and knowledge of their heritage, they nevertheless needed to leave the area because of the lack of opportunity.

Meanwhile, Mama was in St. Louis getting ready to board a train for Grand Haven, Michigan. This was exciting. This was scary. Most of all, Mama hoped that the opportunities in Michigan would make a fine life for her children and herself.

Thanks to her sister, Rachel, she made her way through St. Louis' Union Station. Rachel had been through there before and was able to tell Mama how to find her northbound train. Throughout the war years, the only way to get anywhere was by train. The railroads traversed the country, usually full of soldiers on their way to the East coast and headed for the European war, or they were headed west for the war in the Pacific. Many

Union Station was the hub of rail travel in the mid-United States (See Illustration 3, Appendix C). A beautiful building, its tracks led in all directions--north, south, east, west; a traveler could set out to any part of the United States from St. Louis.⁷ The Missouri Pacific Lines left for points west and south, such as Kansas City, Little Rock, New Orleans and Houston. In later years, when train travel declined, the station was turned into a museum for the people of St. Louis.

The railroad stations were as distinctive as the trains. Nearly every town with a few thousand people had one, probably built during an earlier era, when a town was no place at all unless the railroad came through.⁸

And the accommodations were considered luxurious, from the least (merely a seat for the trip's duration), or a "sleeper" compartment, that boasted daytime benches that let out into beds. The lines were proud of the service they provided. The Missouri Pacific Lines offered, for instance:

The Roomette An increasingly popular accommodation for the individual traveler. Provides a completely enclosed room with private toilet facilities, washstand, wardrobe locker. Other convenience and comfort features include circulating ice water, thermostatic air-conditioning and heat controls, full length mirror, electric razor outlet, shoe locker and spacious luggage rack (See illus.4, Appendix C).⁹

⁷ Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis Historical and Technical Society, Inc. Brochure.

⁸ Ross, *America 1941: A nation at the Crossroads*, 87.

⁹ Missouri Pacific Lines. Brochure, 1948

They offered these same amenities in the "Section", the "Compartment", the "Double Bedroom or Bedroom Suite", and the "Drawing Room" with enough beds for three travelers.

The continuous stream of servicemen was like a broken army in all but spirit--straggling, clustering together, moving in swirling groups of Army, Navy and Marine uniforms of all ranks and grades, mingling with and almost overwhelming the hurrying civilians with their briefcases and bags, their babies, women and bundles (See illus.5, Appendix C).¹⁰ Mama had to manoeuver through the crowds with a baby in one arm and a suitcase in the other. Then there was the bag of bottles and diapers, and her purse. She was only 5'1" tall and weighed scarcely more than 95 pounds (See Illustration 6, Appendix C). She was made of strong stuff, however, and with the optimism of youth and the goad of necessity, she carried her load through the station and onto the train by herself.

With a seven-month old baby (me) and all her baggage, Mama walked past coach after coach of the longest train she'd ever seen (See Illustration 7, Appendix C).

Soldiers bound for East coast bases filled every nook and cranny of the platform and the train. The Missouri Pacific Lines reminded passengers that the war was probably the reason for their delay:

More than half the sleeping cars and a third of all coaches are needed every day to move members of the armed forces--to say nothing of those traveling on furlough. More cars can't be obtained now because materials for their construction must go into war needs. So, there aren't always enough berths or seats.

¹⁰ Bill Yenne. *The History of the Burlington Northern* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1991), 136.

And we're handling so many special troop trains and so many extra war-freight trains that sometimes our passenger trains are delayed. Most of our patrons know that we're doing everything we can to overcome these wartime conditions, and we're mighty grateful for their patience, understanding and cooperation.¹¹

She finally found a seat on a rear coach and prepared for another leg in her journey from southern Missouri to her never before seen home in Grand Haven, Michigan (See Map 2, Appendix A). Mama told me about the experience:

Then when I brought you on the train, I had to go to St. Louis from Hayti. When I got to St. Louis--'d been to that station before, so I knew where it was. And that was the longest train-- I thought, "my word!" I'll never get down to that coach they said I've got to get on. I was carrying you, a suitcase and my bag with diapers and bottles in it. And when I got in there on the thing, there wasn't a seat, it was full, packed with soldiers. Most of them, the ones that weren't sitting, were sitting in the aisles or leaning up against the windows. Well, they were nice, they let me have a seat. And there were some women soldiers too, they were there, too. And, they played with you and talked to you and da-da-da-da. A lot of kissing and hugging going on with some of the women and men soldiers, I tell you. I remember being pretty shocked about that, cause I didn't know people, you know, right out in front of everybody. That's all they were doing, but that's what they were doing. They were sitting in the aisles! I don't know where they were going--they just kept right on going.

Mama had never been to Michigan before in her life. Except for the last three years in St. Louis, all she had ever seen were the endlessly flat cotton and soybean fields of Southeast Missouri. Cotton field were a common sight in

¹¹ Missouri Pacific Lines Timetables, Aug. 1943: 20.

the Bootheel and spurred the economy of southeast Missouri in the 1920s.

The land, called by some the "Swampheel", was drained in the 1920's. Richard

Kirkendall, in *A History of Missouri*, in discussing Missouri's economic development, said,

[A] striking development in the Missouri economy was the rapid advance of cotton in the Bootheel. During the 1920s, agriculture replaced lumbering as the chief economic activity in southeast Missouri as the consequence of both a reduced supply of timber and reclamation projects underway since the turn of the century. These projects drained excess water from the swampland and kept floodwater out.¹²

Mama remembers seeing the huge pieces of earth moving equipment that dug the drainage ditches. She said that behind the equipment was towed a shed that housed the boss' wife and children. During the day, while the men worked, the wife could be seen hanging her laundry outside her little movable home. Later, the ditches were natural magnets for children: they became the local "swimmin' hole." In the *Historical Atlas of Missouri*, Milton D. Rafferty talks about the land reclamation of the 1920s:

The Southeast Lowlands area of Missouri, nearly all of which was originally heavily forested, is nearly level, but in all parts of it there are irregular, north-south-trending sloughs, low swells, and ill-defined terraces...Several thousand acres of wet lands were drained...Land that could be purchased for a few dollars per acre before drainage were selling at prices ranging from \$50 to \$159 per acre in 1925.¹³

¹² Kirkendall, *A History of Missouri*, Columbia: University of Missouri, (1986), 53-54.

¹³ Milton D. Rafferty, *Historical Atlas of Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 90.

In Southeast Missouri, the land would get so dry that large cracks appeared in the earth and fields would look like an earthquake had hit, leaving millions of fissures across the black dirt. The rain came almost without warning. Thunder would suddenly boom and dark clouds would cover the sun. Then came the downpour, bursting like a cotton boll sack brought in for weighing. The downpour sheeted across the land as if someone had instead ripped open a water sack. The dry earth couldn't soak up all the water at once and the fields turned into impassible quagmires. Before paved roads and automobiles, it was a common sight to see a farm wagon stuck up to its wheel hubs in deep, black mud. Unlike the state of Michigan, it wasn't snow and ice that kept children from school: it was mud. Mama remembered those days:

But most days, you couldn't even drive the car, you had to get a horse or a wagon or something just so you could get through the mud--you didn't have paved roads or rock roads or anything--it was awful. They did get them not long after that. I remember the first paved street in Steele and uh, we had a restaurant downtown and for a couple of days they wouldn't let anybody--I don't know how long it was--but may have been a week for all I know--they had the street blocked off so you--anybody couldn't come down through there, so, what we did, all the kids just played there, right there, in front of the stores, especially we did, because he had this restaurant downtown--Papa--it was the biggest and the nicest one there--he and Mama worked their heads off in there. She made all the cakes and pies and he made coffee in one of those big tall things and they-used to have, don't know if they have them anymore--and he had a real good reputation for making good coffee--people would come in just for Doc's coffee--you know how they talk. Oh, yeh, we had a cook--his name was Bad-Eye Crews--and it was so funny--I got to know Bad-Eye real good, you know. And later on, his son and Piddle-dink (Rachel's oldest daughter, Myrana, planned

to get married. You know that boyfriend that she almost got married to and they were all mad about it? Rachel was just scared to death that she was going to marry that boy and he didn't have good sense and his mother spent \$25 for a dress and thought she was dressed up. You know, just people with money. But Bad-Eye wasn't a bad guy--he was a real good cook. But, anyway, Piddle told me one day, she said, oh--she said his first name and she said his last name was Crews--that's Crews. It's an English name and what happened was when he was younger he was hurt and so he couldn't see out of it, but anyway she told me this boy's name was Crews. And I said, "what's his father's name?" And she said, "Baaad-Eye!"

Mama's father moved his family where the jobs were. They lived in northern Arkansas for a short time, in a small town called Monette. Mama remembers holding her pet chicken on her lap during the move. Mama and her brothers and sisters called their father Papa. Listening to Mama describe his tyrannical and selfish style of fathering, it's certain that calling him Papa did not derive from any feeling of affection on the part of the children, but rather fear.

During the Great Depression, following her papa's job changes, she and her sister Rachel vowed that someday they would prosper and have the peace and stability that goes with it. They dreamed of a home where no one was afraid of Papa.

CHAPTER TWO

It wasn't always bad at home, at least when Mama's Papa (Doc Ledford) was at work, or downtown campaigning for Republican office in a Democratic county. William Lancaster (Doc) Ledford seemed born to battle life at every turn and his family bore the brunt of his frustration. Mama always said that if you weren't at the receiving end of his abuse, then he seemed like a really dynamic fellow.

Everyone called him Doc in Steele, Missouri, his having been named after the local doctor in 1897. Years into adulthood, Mama decided that he might have been born mean, but it didn't help that he was the runt of his family. His six foot tall brothers were handsome and popular--even their grandmother favored them with candy when she visited. But Doc never grew past 5'6"--he said his height was that much. Those who knew him well said he was the quintessential cocky bantam rooster with a more controlling side than most of that description.

The Ledfords were proud, hardworking landowners whose ancestors had come from England (the name once referred to working with lead at the ford in the river.

The populations of the new states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois--and later, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa--consisted of a conglomeration of peoples. These peoples generally migrated in homogeneous groups and settled in particular regions. As a result, the Midwest was more like an ethnic and cultural checkerboard than the proverbial melting pot.¹⁴

Doc's mother (Mama's grandmother and my great-grandmother), Florence Esterlee Nightingale Burroughs was named for the famed Crimean War nurse. Florence, or Grandmaw as Mama called her, was a formidable woman who survived most of her children and lived long enough to make a lasting impression on me.

Florence was one of several children of Daniel and Elizabeth Borroughs. There was a native-American ancestor, the Cherokee husband of one of Florence's grandmothers. Daniel and his family lived in a big white house on the Tennessee River near Union City, Tennessee. The house was typical of the era, with a long central hallway that opened onto rooms on either side, each room having a fireplace. He named one of his sons LaFayette, after the Revolutionary War general. The family called him Uncle Fayt. Daniel Borroughs owed a cotton gin and gristmill and provided well for his family. He was also known for playing the violin at local dances and reunions.

On the paternal side of Doc's family were the Ledfords who came from Cerro Gordo, Tennessee. A large family, their sympathies led them to back

¹⁴ Andrew Cayton and Peter S. Onuf, *The Midwest and the Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 27.

the northern side of the Civil War. Joseph Vincent Ledford, Sr., Doc's grandfather, was killed in action fighting with the Union army.

Most of the state of Tennessee's volunteers chose to fight for the Confederacy; however, many in the Eastern side of the state, went with the Union.

In *A History of Missouri*, Richard Kirkendall, in discussing the predominantly southern leanings of southeastern Missourians, says,

...many identified with what they regarded as the southern way of life and celebrated Confederate holidays. Tennesseans of both Confederate and anti-Confederate persuasions formed large parts of the populations of the Ozarks and the Bootheel.¹⁵

Joseph's widow, Sarah, known as "Sally", carried on by coming to the porch with a shotgun every time someone set foot in her yard. This was not an uncommon response because murderous soldiers wandered the countryside after the Civil War. Sometimes they were just hungry confederates on their way home after Lee's surrender in April of 1865; frequently, however, they were former rebel soldiers who now lived as guerillas.

Disorganized guerrilla forces in Missouri and the surrounding states stayed in the saddle well into the summer [of 1865], fearing that their surrender would not be accepted.¹⁶

¹⁵ Kirkendall, *A History of Missouri*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, (1986), 10.

¹⁶ Fellman, *Inside War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 231.

In *Inside War*, Sarah P. Harlan, a young Missouri woman, expressed a common sentiment after the Civil War:

Some have concluded to stay and tough it out and tough enough it will be--for all we hear great talk of peace but the bushwhackers are plenty in here.¹⁷

Sally Ledford, Doc's grandmother, was admired by her family for her fortitude and sense of duty. A family story, for instance, says that she never left her room in the morning unless she was perfectly dressed and her hair pulled tightly back into a bun. She and her children were successful at working the farm left her by her husband.

Joseph Ledford, Jr., Doc's father, met and married Florence Boroughs in Tennessee. They had seven children, including Mama's Aunt Lydie, or Lydia, as she was named. The other children were named Joseph Carmie, Tyre Ozell, Jesse McCoy, Samuel Swain, Elizabeth (Aunt Lizzie) and Mama's father, William Lancaster (See Illustration 8, Appendix C).

We inherited from the Civil War not merely a sharp political cleavage between east and west; the economic cleavage is as great. The farming in the Valley of East Tennessee is essentially different from that of West Tennessee. Our cities vary as much as our country districts. Memphis is the commercial center of a great agricultural region; it prospers or suffers with the prosperity or adversity of a hundred thousand cotton farms in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas.¹⁸

¹⁷ Fellman, *Inside War*, 231.

¹⁸ E.E. Miller, "Tennessee: Three-Quarters of Bewilderment" in *These United States*, ed. Daniel H. Borus, p 343.

The family bought farmland across the Mississippi River in Missouri's "Bootheel" and they were able to give a parcel of land to each child as they reached adulthood.

For its population, Missouri was originally indebted to three things--the bad land in Virginia, the failure of the potato crop in Ireland in 1847, and the revolution in Germany in 1848. [The] Virginia immigration gave to Missouri society a Southern tinge which many communities still retain. A Southern family tradition lingers, too, where the invading Yankees have not smothered it, and helps Missouri to resist change.¹⁹

I remember Mama talking about her uncles many times as I was growing up. She was very fond of them all, most especially Uncle Jess. And, she said that everyone in town knew who they were and told Mama later that when the Ledford brothers were together, there was a lot of horseplay and laughter (See Illustration 9, Appendix C). All but her own papa were indulgent with their families and Mama envied their children. The loss of her uncles, as well as her own brother, Buddy, has been very hard for her, each death another emotional punch from which to recover.

Florence and her "sisters" of the nineteenth century worked from dawn to dusk. There was no milk unless they milked the cow; no dinner unless they visited the curing shed (for hams) or the chicken yard; no clothing unless they spun the yarn, made the cloth and sewed the clothing themselves; no butter or cream unless they churned the milk; no cleaning or medical supplies unless

¹⁹ Manley O. Hudson, "Missouri: Doesn't What to Be Shown," In *These United States*, ed. Daniel Borus, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 207.

they put together their own ingredients from the herb garden. It had been the same for centuries. Orra Langhorne, in *Southern Sketches from Virginia*, commented on what was actually expected of a "lady":

The gentle and refined lady who was mistress of a Virginia plantation would have stood poorly among her peers, would have failed in the eyes of her husband and children, and fallen below the ideal she set for herself, if she had not been familiar with a score of trades.²⁰

Uncle Sam became a peace officer in Missouri and was shot when he went to the home of an angry citizen. Jess was a favorite uncle whose kindness was well known in the area. Mama and I visited him when he became ill, and that's the first time I remember seeing all the aunts and uncles in one place. Mama looks most like her Aunt Lizzy (Elizabeth).

Florence married again after the death of Mr. Ledford--that's what everyone called him--and she spent her remaining years married to Mr. Barnes as Florence Esterlee Nightingale Borroughs Ledford Barnes. Her family wasn't happy about the match, since, from their youth, Mr. Ledford and Mr. Barnes had not seen eye to eye. Mama told me more about her grandmaw:

They call it extended families now--it was just that, we had lots of relatives. And Grandma thought it was her absolute duty to feed everybody in the world that came to the door--including us. And that's the way people were--not just her--that's the way people were.

²⁰ Orra Langhorne, *Southern Sketches from Virginia 1881-1901*, ed. Charles E. Wynes (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1964),

When I knew Grandma Florence, she was in her eighties, a little old lady with white hair pulled back into a bun with large combs on each side of her head. She always dressed in ankle-length dresses; it looked as if she had paid no attention to the changing of dress styles over the years. She was strong, caring, and loving. She insisted on making a meal for visitors. I remember that, as a child, Mama and I visited her on a trip to Steele. I probably said I was hungry and my great-grandmother immediately prepared a platter of fried eggs for everyone. I had never liked fried eggs, but cooked by her, they were delicious; I wish every fried egg could taste as good as the one I ate that day. Her little house was set back from the street and was entered by walking through and under her garden: The overhead trellis that led to the house was covered in vines that provided a leafy bower in which to sit on hot Missouri afternoons.

Mama remembers that if it weren't for her grandmother Florence, her life would have been much harder to bear. Everyone was welcome at Florence's house. Every morning after breakfast, she put something on the stove so that she could feed anyone who walked through the door. And that included unemployed wanderers and farm laborers as well as relatives. Mama and her sisters and brothers knew that their stomachs would be lovingly filled at Grandmaw's house. A cousin of Mama's later said that he just dropped by after several years absence and was amazed that Florence had food on the stove. Mama said that it wasn't strange at all:

Grandmaw--she and Grandpaw always had plenty of food. You could go there any time and she always had a lot of food going. Cousin Royce stopped here at this house to see me and he said, "it seemed like she always had dinner ready when we got there-- I don't know how she knew we were coming." I said she didn't know when you were coming, she always had it ready in case somebody came. That's just the way people did in those days. Well, they had dinner in the middle of the day. She had big pots of beans and vegetables and corn and you know, turnip greens-- however, I didn't like the turnip greens, but she had a lot of them that did like them. Just butter--you know, she'd churn, they'd churn and churn that buttermilk. Mama did too. Yep, you couldn't get it at the store.

In the early eighteenth century, her ancestors had moved "west" to Tennessee, when Tennessee was still the country's wilderness. Some of Florence's words were strange to her own descendants because they came from her girlhood in Tennessee--the same words used by her English ancestors, who came to the United States only a hundred years before. One very feminine example that Mama remembers was her grandmother's "fascinator," a long, hand-made shawl in various colors that she wrapped around her head and shoulders when she went out. It's name probably indicates it's ability to attract a man for marriage.

Florence also called lights of any kind "lamps" with a pronunciation that made the "a" rhyme with "lay". When she was elderly, she would reply that she "was feeling a little lame today."

The South, indeed, the entire country, altered their speech somewhat with the advent of the radio, and then, television. It wasn't long before folklorists realized that much of the old speech was disappearing. In the mid-

twentieth century, they visited the Tennessee hills to interview the few inhabitants left who used the old words.

Perhaps the most significant influence of radio, even in the early 1930's, was the effect its programming was having upon the homogeneity of the nation. The United States had always been afflicted by sectional, regional, and cultural differences which kept it from becoming a fully united nation. Historical events, linguistic idiosyncracies, and cultural differences all testify to the heterogeneity of the country. Radio increased communication within the United States. Although local stations might have reflected provincialism in their own program originations, network broadcasting transmitted a single standard. The same announcers were heard coast-to-coast; celebrities became nationally known, the values and attitudes projected in radio dramas were heard by millions in every part of the country.²¹

Now everyone could hear what people sounded like in New York City, Chicago, Dallas and Los Angeles.

Now that Mama is a grandmother herself, she says she realizes that Grandmaw might have done more to help them. Florence knew that her son Doc (William) was abusive to his wife and children, particularly Allen, called Buddy. But it was different then. Even big-hearted Grandmaw wouldn't go against her own upbringing in a world that allowed a man, if he were so inclined, to be, literally, the tyrant of his castle.

In *The Southern Lady*, Anne Firor Scott comments on the changes in Southern family life at the start of the twentieth century:

²¹ Fred J. MacDonald. *Don't Touch That Dial! Radio Programming in American Life 1920-1960* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), 37.

It was in the towns that the newer forms of family life first appeared as the old patriarchal mode began to give way to a more egalitarian way of doing things. Families were smaller, and more influenced by the outside world. Women and children who would once have been expected to bow entirely to the father's will were finding a voice. A woman born in the [18] eighties could still remember that "no one ever questioned what Papa said," and Ellen Glasgow reported that her father never changed his mind or admitted he was wrong. Theirs was the last generation for whom such memories were common.²²

So Mama, Rachel and Buddy, the oldest three, lived through the worst of the abuse. As children, they worked in the cotton fields and Mama, as oldest, was responsible for the younger ones. In the South of the times, schools closed for a few weeks in early fall in order to get the cotton crop in.

Also, Mama was responsible for watching out for the little ones while her mother, Mattie finished getting the family ready to go to town. Mama remembers what it was like:

We had all the children then, that I'm talking about, except Joe, he came so much later. She had--when we'd get ready to go somewhere, you know, why she had to start with the first one and go right on down to the baby and herself, see, to get us ready. Imogene was the baby. So there was just a lot of stuff going on there, so she'd get Rachel and me ready first, now, we were still--she'd see to it that we, you know, we had on what we were supposed to--get clean, wash our hair and all that stuff and put on our best Sunday clothes and sit us on the porch. And I can remember what we were wearing about that time, at least one summer--we had on...she made all our clothes...and she was good at it. And what she'd do is get the same material for Rachel and me, but she'd put them in different colors--she always put Rachel in pink and me in blue and I don't know why

²² Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 214.

that was, because looking back on it, I'm pretty sure I looked better in the pink and Rachel in the blue. But she got matching hats - bought from Sears, Roebuck, you know, through the mail and I can remember the hat--they were real soft-looking straw--real soft--I don't know how they did that. It had a little brim and had flowers all around the top like that. And mine was blue and Rachel's was pink--she had on a pink dress and a pink hat and I had on a blue dress and a blue hat. And she told us, you know, just don't get off the porch, just stand right there, you know. Told us not to--don't move, is what she said. I mean she meant it too--she wasn't just talking. Papa never helped her with anything. And then she'd get Buddy and Lucille ready, you know, and they'd stand on the porch. And then she'd go fix herself and the baby

(The baby refers to Imogene. Born between Lucille and Joseph, Imogene lived only two years).

The adults kept Mama back a year from entering school, so that she could wait for Rachel to go with her. Together, they walked with cousins and neighbors down a railroad track. Why the railroad track? Mama said that in Southeast Missouri it was too muddy to walk anywhere else:

Well, that's what they used when I was growing up--[the local residents used] mules. Some used horses, but that wasn't the usual thing to do the work--the mules were stronger. They never took me to school on a wagon--we walked down the railroad track--it was dry. Course, if it rained, we got wet, but that was just incidental, that's what happens to kids when they're walking--nobody thought anything about it--least mine didn't. I walked with my cousins, you know, I had a whole lot of cousins, and then we walked with the Dodds and Pritchards--they were neighboring farmers and they were cousins--the Dodds and the Pritchards were cousins. And we walked with them--we all walked together--I forget how many there were, but, I mean, you know, maybe 15-20 kids all up and down the railroad tracks. And I mean, there were BIG locomotives came

through there pulling trains and everything, but we could feel the train coming long before it got there - we could feel it on the rails.

It was always up to Mama to see that they got home safely:

We were just little kids and I still remember when Rachel and I were walking by ourselves--I don't know why, maybe we stayed at school too long, I don't know what was happening and you know, we were little--seven or six yrs old, something like that. And she was always stubborn! If she got tired, she'd just sit down by the side of the road..."mmm, I'm tired." and she wouldn't move. And I knew I couldn't go home without her--they'd be all over me, you know cause I left her. So I had to wait until she decided she wasn't tired before she could go. I used to get so mad at her. I didn't get tired. One time she kept walking real slow down just this way--hmmmmmm. So I walked on up ahead of her real fast and she was back there and I kept hollering at her to hurry up--she wouldn't do it--and finally, I could feel the train was coming, you know. And so I hollered at her the train was coming, to get off the tracks—we weren't on the rails, we weren't on the steel part, we were on the little spaces, the ties, called railroad ties, about that wide, you know. I told her the train was coming, she didn't even lift up her head, didn't say a word to me, like she didn't hear me. I ran down that path just as hard as I could go and told her the train was coming, and I got there and I told her the train was coming. She still had her head down, hmmmmmm, and so I grabbed her by the arm and dragged her down that bank. I've told her many times I saved her life. I don't know what she would have done--she wasn't paying any attention to me or the train. It wasn't right up on her, but I could feel it coming.

This was the 1920's; no one thought anything of children walking for miles to school and back. Mama says this was a time when people left their doors unlocked. Mama told me what it was like to live in those times:

You know, we went down through there for several years and of course, some of my cousins, the Dodds and the Pritchards,

walked on it all the way through high school. I didn't, we moved to other places, but nobody ever got killed. People just let their kids walk down this, nowadays I've have had been scared to death to let my child do that. And it wasn't just the trains--we met bums and everything, you know, walking the tracks. Nowadays that would be so dangerous, but they didn't bother us. It was the 20's--they didn't bother us. There was this one man, I guess you call simple-minded, mentally-deficient, whatever. What was his name? Gosh, I used to know his name. He walked down the track every day, rain, snow, whatever it was doing. He lived in Steele and he was a full grown man and we met him every day coming down the railroad track and going to school and coming back too. He was coming back home just like we were--just walking and walking. And they'd all holler at him and make fun, laugh at him, ask him stuff, you know, and he'd act like he was going to hit us or something, uhhhhh, like that, but he--nobody thought he was serious, nobody paid any attention to him and I was half afraid of him myself--I knew there was something wrong with him and everybody said there was something wrong with him. But nobody ever told us to watch out for him! Nobody! And he didn't bother anybody--he never did. Nobody ever bothered us.

Matt gave birth to a total of six children, five of whom lived to adulthood. Rural areas of the South were among the last places to use birth control--indeed, to change their thinking regarding women's roles.

Few things were more important for changing the shape of women's lives in the family than the spreading knowledge of contraception and the general advances in medicine.²³

Mama told me about the year her brother Joseph was born:

1931--that's the year my brother Joe was born. That's probably right. Well, he's retirement age now, but he's decided not to retire yet. He was born in January and I was fourteen in June. I remember very well when he was born. It's hard to realize he's

²³ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 218.

64. I remember when he was born--at night--we were all in the next room when we lived in Maplewood, where we all went to school with Mr. Capps. And Papa was there--with the doctor. And.... Dr. McDaniel--the only doctor in town--I don't know if there was anybody around or not. I went to school with his daughter Qbelle--she sent me a letter a couple of years ago from Cape Girardeau asking me to come to the reunion. Just come to the reunion--high school graduation, you know. Only her name now is Qbelle Pruitt. She was his adopted daughter--she was a little orphan girl. One of his wife's relatives had died and left her an orphan and so they adopted her.

The Great Depression began in 1929 with the crash of the stock market. It took time for the full impact of the Depression to hit the heartland, but it moved in, nevertheless. T.H. Watkins, in *The Great Depression*, said:

Consider fear. Even if they did not lose their jobs or go hungry themselves, even if the terror of want passed over them without touching them, most Americans felt its passage like a cold, unforgettable wind.²⁴

I asked Mama if she saw any lines of unemployed, any "soup" lines as depicted in the books written of the period. She replied:

No, there was, but not where I lived in 1931, there wasn't. Where I began to notice them so much was when I was 15 and 16--that's when it all was--and then they started being really hungry--people were going to these places where they could get food. Not that they were cooking food and handing it to them like they do nowadays--they didn't do that at all--they had no facilities for that and they didn't do that. But if you ran out of food, you could go there and get flour or potatoes or whatever you had to have or whatever they had on hand. And some--each town, they had a place where you could do that. And eventually when the people didn't have any work at all, they--Roosevelt was elected--and one of the first things he did

²⁴

T.H. Watkins, *The Great Depression*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), 12.

besides, you know, closing the banks, which he did, was to--and I remember very well when that happened--why he did a lot of things to help people that didn't have any work or money. And one was they had the WPA²⁵ where everybody could go to work.

Watkins had this to say about the United States efforts to help the unemployed:

Its massive relief efforts in the early years of the New Deal, however frantically administered, were acts of mercy that would be felt and remembered on very personal levels. The work and work-relief programs of the Public works Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, the National Youth Administrations, and the Works Progress Administration would make the federal government the primary employer for millions of people.²⁶

If it weren't for the work relief programs, many families would have starved. Mama remembers the government putting men to work:

Well, they built the gym in Steele--a new gym--with WPA workers--it's still there, I guess. And all kinds of things like that. I remember them working alongside the road, clearing the road of brush and everything--the WPA workers. And if you didn't have any food, well, you could go to these places and get food, but my dad was too proud.

Mama remembers that Doc never asked for help. There were lean times, and she and Rachel shared their few items of clothing. She says that, like many people of the time, Papa's pride would not allow him to take handouts. Mama had this to say about her family's hard times:

I think he had seen us starve and fall on the floor before he'd go ask for money--ask for anything. He wouldn't do it. A lot of

²⁵ Works Progress Administration

²⁶ Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 17.

people in those days were extremely proud--they seem to have gotten over it now, since the government does everything for you. But then, they were very proud and a lot of people just wouldn't do it at all. They would accept work with the WPA, but they wouldn't ask for help. Their families helped them a lot if need be--like in our family they kind of helped each other.

And, so, Mama lived through the great depression, surrounded by loving relatives. However, along with her brothers and sisters, she lived under the abusive control of Papa. It was only as I grew older that I gradually learned how traumatic that childhood was for her. My own was charmed in comparison. Because of her father, Mama married a kind man, and, she indulged her children in ways that she was never allowed.

CHAPTER THREE

Doc took after his father, Joseph Ledford, a stern, strong-minded man who wasn't afraid to give his opinion to anyone. Mama remembers her grandfather, Joseph, was not approachable like Florence. She remembers seeing him, with cane swinging, chasing grandchildren out of his fruit trees.

Mama's mother, Mattie Ophelia Latimer ran off to marry Doc when she was only eighteen. Her father, Alexander Latimer, tried to stop them, but his horse wasn't fast enough. She was the joy of her father's life and the only one to defy him by marrying young: her much older brothers and sisters weren't married until after the age of thirty (See Illustration 10, Appendix C). Mattie Ophelia Latimer looked like her mother, Josephine DeMu Childers, the "French" woman of the family: the girls were tall and beautiful with red hair; their skin was very white, their eyes were blue and their noses aquiline. Josephine's other children, and Mattie's siblings, were Charles Marian, known as Uncle Tuck; LaFayette, known as Uncle Fayt; Laura; and, Onie. Ironically, I have a picture of a young Onie who died in childbirth, but not a young picture of my grandmother, Mattie. Mattie was rather vain and stubborn and she destroyed a picture of herself because, as she said, "the hats on she and her

sister looked silly.” Mattie’s father, John David Latimer, was born during the Civil War. John David’s father, Alexander Latimer, was shot by bushwackers during the Civil War when he came home to see his newest son. On the road back to his Confederate troops near Union City, Tennessee, he was killed for his horse. Local residents found him and brought him home. His gravesite can still be seen in Union City, Tennessee (See Illustrations 11 and 12, Appendix C). The son he came home to see was named Tennessee Victory, in commemoration of the battle of Shiloh in 1862.²⁷ Of course, the moniker was a burden to bear, and would be for any child, so he called himself John. Even that name didn’t take, and he was known to his family in later years as Uncle Hoss.

When I researched my grandmother Mattie’s maiden name, Latimer, I found that it was an old English name, meaning “Latin teacher;” in the sixteenth century, a Bishop Latimer died by order of Queen Mary of England for the sin of refusing to recant his Protestant faith.²⁸

The current Latimer family knows that they migrated from Ireland in the early eighteenth century. Probably when they had settled in Ireland, perhaps centuries before, they were Protestant followers of the English church. My grandmother Mattie always said she was Irish, but hated

²⁷ Thomas L. Connelly, *Civil War Tennessee*, 45

²⁸ J.A. of Ailward. *An historical narration of the judgement of some most learned and godly English bishops, holy martyrs, and others.* (London: Printed for Rebecca Nealand..., 1645), 90-103. Wing Microfilm Reel 232, Item E21, no.10.

Catholics; however, she never knew why. It was pointed out to her in later years that she was of English decent, and over time, the family had lost track of who they were, and had no memory of a reason for hating Catholics.

My grandmother Mattie and grandfather Doc had five surviving children, my mama being the oldest. Mattie found herself in an increasingly intolerable marriage. But this was the early twentieth century. Although she "bobbed" ²⁹ her hair in the 1920's style and handled all of Papa's taxes and paperwork, it wasn't until 1938 that she found the courage to divorce Doc.

In the South as elsewhere the number of divorces had been increasing more rapidly than the population since 1870. At first glance this seemed clear evidence of a growing social instability. A closer look raised some doubts about the soundness of this conclusion....Even more important was the inner meaning of the increasing divorce rate. Ernest Groves observed that the authoritarian family of the patriarchal type effectively *concealed* discord.³⁰

Mattie also learned to drive. Mama remembers, as a child in the 1920s, standing in the front yard watching her mother drive the family car toward the house. The country dirt road had a tree in the middle that dictated autos go either to the right or the left of it. Mama remembers thinking that her mother was going to hit that tree for sure because she drove so fast. At the last minute, she seemed to realize the obstacle in her path and veered to the right, just missing the tree.

²⁹ Bobbing one's hair meant cutting it short.

³⁰ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 217.

Like the woman quoted below, Mattie could have professed her modernity:

I suppose I am a modern woman. I have succumbed to the "bob," drive my own car, vote to suit myself, and have the mischief of a time in getting interest and taxes together.³¹

In spite of her difficult life, Mattie never stopped loving Doc. After many years of separation, she married him again when they were both in their sixties.

Mama says her mother Mattie was a strong woman--strong because she was able to live with Papa and raise five children under very difficult circumstances. Because she concentrated on pleasing her husband, however, Mattie's oldest child, my mama, was often responsible for the younger children.

Everyone worked from dawn to dusk: laundry done in the backyard over a fire, chickens and pigs to be fed, hams to be prepared and smoked, clothing made by hand, cotton fields to "chop", and a vegetable garden to tend.

It is hard to realize the amount of hard physical work which was required. There were very few laborsaving devices. Water had to be carried in from springs, or, with luck, an iron pump. Neither electricity nor gasoline motors were generally available to substitute for woman power, and most chores involved lifting, carrying digging, pumping or pouring--all using energy and muscle.³²

³¹ Harris, 134.

³² Eleanor Arnold, ed., *Voices of American Homemakers*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 11.

If chicken was on the supper menu, Mattie wrung the unfortunate fowl's neck, plucked her clean, and dredged her in flour for frying in a big iron skillet. Mama told me about some of her childhood memories:

Back when I was young and when I was going to grade school, at least, the stores did not have milk--you know, go get a bottle of milk--that isn't the way they did. Later on, they developed these routes where the people were on a route and they'd come up to your house. And we moved to Monette [Arkansas], that's what they did, they delivered milk to our house. And when we [Mama and Dad in 1944] moved to Grand Haven, they were still delivering milk right to the door. Sure, I loved it, it was cream to the top, it was nice. I used the cream separate in the summer when they had blueberries and strawberries. Like lopped it off with a spoon, and whipped it and it was just about right for us, you know. And it was real nice like that. And I remember, for a long time I knew the name of the people that delivered milk to us in Grand Haven--in the glass bottles and if it was cold outside and they'd sit it by the door, if you didn't go out and get it right away, when you went out, it was frozen and the cream was sticking up at the top there up over the bottle. Nobody stole our milk! No, they didn't. They didn't rob you on the street or in the house. You just didn't even think about that.

When the family moved back to Missouri from Monette, they lived in Braggadocio (the Webster's Dictionary definition is, "braggart, boaster,"³³), a wide place in the road that also boasted the birthplace of her future husband, Creston Bruce. Mama said that, as a child, it was a dismal, work-a-day life:

We all thought it was the end of no place. We didn't know . . . around there . . . just a few like us. Most had their big farms. I was in the ninth grade and Creston (Dad) was driving the school

³³

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Pocket Book.

bus but I never rode on his bus because I lived in town. I don't know how I got introduced to him. I know how I met him--Gary [Mama's son and my brother] tells that to everybody he knows. I don't know why I went [to see him] can't imagine. [A schoolmate] just wanted me to so I did--she said he was her boyfriend. And the first time I went to the movies or somewhere with him--I don't know where we went--there sure weren't many places to go around there--she found out about it and came over to my house and bawled me out about it for taking her boyfriend away from her.

In the hard-working world of southeastern Missouri, my father Creston Jonathan Bruce stood out among the farmers in overalls: he was 5'8", with a very slim build, black hair and blue eyes, and a hook nose he inherited from his own father, Claude Jonathan Bruce (See Illustration 13, Appendix C). Mama remembers vividly what a sharp dresser Creston was. With his good looks and slim physique, his intelligence and education, and, above all, his fine manners, he made a distinct impression on the young ladies of the area.

Mama has told me many times how she met my dad:

We weren't kids--we were 15-16 yrs old. [A friend] said she thought I was her friend and I had betrayed her. I remember being really upset because she talked that way. So then I asked him if that was his girlfriend and he said no.

Dad interrupted our conversation here:

I never had a date with her.

Mama finished:

That's what he said. I didn't know who he was until she took me over there. So then I found out he drove the school bus--I didn't know who drove the school bus til then--and he worked in his uncle Arch's garage. We went walking and to things at the school. Dad interrupts again: we didn't do anything. Mama went on: At the school—like a lot of places small like that--they had a lot--everything that went on, they had at the gym. We went to places like that and he got his uncle's bus and we went to Caruthersville to the movies--driving the school bus--just me and him in it. Dad continued the story: it would run out of water if it got too hot. Mama went on: I don't remember that part. We didn't want to walk. We smooched pretty good for teenagers, didn't we, Creston?

Dad answered, "We sure did."

Mama continued:

Yep, but that was all--they didn't do like they do today--you were a fallen woman if you did that (See Illustration 14, Appendix C).

Their moral values were typical of the era. But certainly there is evidence that sexual standards did change during this period. A 1939 survey of college-educated women reported that in the survey only 26 percent of the respondents born between 1890 and 1900 had premarital sex as compared to 69 percent of those born after 1913. Another study that suggested increased sexual activity among unmarried women found a steady rise in the number of pregnant brides after 1900.³⁴

³⁴ Joel Spring, *Images of American Life*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 68.

Decades before the "pill" and the sexual freedom of the 1960's, a young woman had to maintain her standards and her goals if she wanted a husband her family approved of. Mama explained what she was taught:

My mama and grandmaw told me, "Don't do that. Nobody will have you then for a wife--nobody you'd want." I think it's pretty true today myself, I mean, a whole lot. But anyway, sure was then, you were just out of it. And, I got asked out all the time by guys, but I couldn't go with them. I was fifteen and Papa wouldn't let me [date]. He'd say, "that old stringy-haired boy--I wouldn't allow him on the place--get him out of here" --that's what he'd tell me. You're not going anywhere, he'd say. But he didn't say that about Creston. He liked him for some reason or other (See Illustration 15, Appendix C).

Dad interjected here, "I probably looked like a wimp."

Mama continued:

I don't think [his relatives' wealth] made any difference--he knew he didn't have any money. Papa kept telling me about this one or that one around town that had money--some farmers had money. And he'd try to get me interested--and maybe I'd be friendly with them--he did that. He thought it was his duty to marry us off to well-off people. And he didn't mention anybody that would have anything to do with us. Besides, we were too young for him to be talking like that. He wanted me to get interested in Grenstead and later I found out he was about ten years older than me. Good God! Besides, he didn't even know me.

Times were changing, but Allene and her sister Rachel knew that if they wanted the life they dreamed of, they must choose the right man for marriage. Mama told me what it was like:

Rachel said, "ah, he thought we were supposed to just stand on the front porch and look pretty and they'd ride by and get us on

their white horse and ride off " that's what she says. I said we weren't that good looking. She said, "Well, he thought we were." Neither one of us had any desire whatever to do that--uhn uh. We had a problem with our father--all the way through--he was just awful. But he didn't say anything about me going out with Creston. I don't know--he and uncle Jess knew him personally and decided he was okay Well, you got dressed up in those days--you didn't run around looking the back end of nowhere like they do today. They got all dolled up when they came to pick you up. Just be pressed and shined like you wouldn't believe. I didn't see him--not long after we started going together--he went to the CCC's.

The Civilian Conversation Corps (CCC's) was one of President Franklin Roosevelt's work-relief programs during the Great Depression of the 1930's. According to T.H. Watkins, in his book, *The Great Depression*, men between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four were eligible to earn a living by working for the government:

They would serve terms of no more than nine months so that as many as possible could be accommodated over the course of time.³⁵

Dad participated in the road-building project in Missouri's Ozarks by serving as the supply officer. Mama said:

I didn't even hardly see him anymore. I didn't see him again until I graduated from high school and moved to Caruthersville. He had so many girlfriends, he couldn't remember who I was--that's true. He says he did, but I don't believe it. Well, all those old girls tried to marry him, I know that. He said every one he went with wanted to marry him.

³⁵

Watkins, *The Great Depression*. 131

Dad said, "oh, yeh--they wouldn't come across at all, they wanted to marry."

Mama finished:

The only one who wanted to come across--as he calls it--was the doctor's wife. Yep, at the CCC camp. She propositioned him. That's true. This world's just full of that stuff.

Dad completed the story, "I was back from Springfield (Missouri), driving her car and two babies."

I've heard the story many times from Mama that Dad came back from the CCC's and had been back for a few weeks when he walked by her house. She was sitting on the front porch, they struck up a conversation, he asked her out, and the rest is history. They were married on August 12, 1938.

This letter was included in a history of the Kersey family (Clara Risk Kersey's family), written by a distant cousin.

Mama and Dad always said that Dad's mother (my paternal grandmother) remained single so long because she was the sole caretaker and companion of her mother, Sarah Long Coleman Kersey, a domineering woman who spent her last days blind and institutionalized.²⁸

She did, however, want the best for Clara, and so, while in St. Louis, Clara attended a business college. One family anecdote is that Clara was robbed on her way home from an office job. Somehow, later, the robber

²⁸ Creston J. Bruce, personal interview, 1996.

expressed surprise that she was a "working girl" because of her demeanor and fine dress.

The grandmother that I called "Granny" was about 5'5" tall with a lovely figure, light brown hair and soft blue eyes.

CHAPTER FOUR

Clara met Claude Jonathan Bruce, my father, was born to Clara Risk Kersey and Creston Jonathan Bruce. It came as a surprise to all of her relatives that Clara married at all. Single until she was twenty-six years old, her uncle, Doctor "Bob", a local doctor, wrote to a relative about the spinster, Clara. He said at the time that she was traveling to St. Louis seeking a doctor for her mama's eyes. This letter was included in a history of the Kersey family (Clara Risk Kersey's family), written by a distant cousin.

Mama and Dad always said that Dad's mother (my paternal grandmother) remained single so long because she was the sole caretaker and companion of her mother, Sarah Long Coleman Kersey, a domineering woman who spent her last days blind and institutionalized.³⁶

She did, however, want the best for Clara, and so, while in St. Louis, Clara attended a business college. One family anecdote is that Clara was robbed on her way home from an office job. Somehow, later, the robber

³⁶ Creston J. Bruce, personal interview, 1996.

expressed surprise that she was a "working girl" because of her demeanor and fine dress.

The grandmother that I called "Gammy" was about 5'5" tall with a lovely figure, light brown hair and soft blue eyes.

Clara met Claude Jonathan Bruce in Braggadocio, Missouri where he had moved with his family from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Born in Mississippi, he had two half-sisters, Verna Huckleby White and Lucille Huckleby and a half-brother, Arch Huckleby.

My grandfather Claude was of average height for the times, had red hair, blue eyes and a hawk-like nose. He worked at the time at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. He married my grandmother, Clara Kersey, in St. Louis in 1910.

He sits in his wedding picture on the arm of the photographer's ornate Victorian chair with his new wife standing just to the side, her hand on his shoulder. My grandmother's small frame is tucked in tightly at the waist and her perfectly fitting dress brushes the tops of her high button-top shoes. For her honeymoon trip, my grandmother wore a heavy traveling coat called a "duster", and a very fashionable hat with countless numbers of feathers on it, crowned with a bird!(See Illustrations 16 and 17, Appendix C)

They returned to southeastern Missouri soon after they married. Clara gave birth to six children. The oldest died at birth, making Creston Jonathan, my father, the oldest (See Illustration 18, Appendix C).

My grandfather Claude was an intelligent man who tried several vocations, including running a local store. His sons, my father, Creston, among them, agree now that it was probably his soft heart that frustrated his retail success. And, recently, Dad's brother, my uncle Harold, said that his father might have eventually enjoyed success if his life had not been cut short.³⁷

Dad would say later that his father gave credit easily to his neighbors. While it was common to use credit at the local stores, Claude was not good at insisting on payment. Besides, he much preferred to putter around in the back shed with his inventions, a trait that my father inherited.

Claude Jonathan Bruce, my grandfather, died in 1926, in his own bed, of pneumonia, while my dad, only fourteen years old at the time, and the other children, waited outside. Penicillin had not yet been developed. It might have saved his life:

If you had pneumonia in 1885,...Survival, unfortunately, was an uncommon and unpredictable event... Thanks to penicillin, discovered in 1928 and developed as a drug in the 1940's, pneumococcal pneumonia no longer is the threat it once was.³⁸

After Claude died, my dad went to work mornings driving the school bus before he went to classes himself. These were the years before the United States enacted laws providing public assistance and welfare programs. My grandmother Gammy's stepbrother, Parker Kersey, the local banker, was a

³⁷ Harold K. Bruce, personal interview, 1996.

vital reason for her family's survival after Claude's death. Banker Kersey was a wealthy man who made his money during the Great Depression--some in the family say because he took advantage of farm foreclosures. In the end, he owned much of the rich farmland of the Bootheel. He provided a rent-free house for his widowed sister, Clara, and her five children. He also sent a monthly stipend that, no doubt, meant the difference between eating and not eating (See Illustration 19, Appendix C).

But it was Creston, her oldest son, that she relied on most and he was a dutiful son. Dad was a good student in school: the teachers, including his uncle Julius Long, the "schoolmaster," advanced him two grades in junior high school.

Dad's mother Clara would rely on him for years to come and she bemoaned the loss of his faithful financial support when, at the age of twenty-six, he married my Mama, Allene Ledford. But Clara's younger children, Herman, Mildred, Harold, and Parker, born after his father's death, were now able to care for themselves. Herman married and moved to St. Louis where his son Mark was born; Mildred married James Ridgeley, an accountant, and later lived in Tel Aviv, Israel, before settling in Carlsbad, New Mexico; Harold married Virginia Renfro, had three children--Kenneth, Cynthia and Jan--and built a small grocery store business into a grocery chain in Missouri and

Tennessee; and, the youngest, Parker, married in his thirties and settled in St. Louis with his wife and son (See Illustration 20, Appendix C).

Meanwhile, in 1944, Mama was holding me in her lap as her train heads north. She was thinking of the turns her life has taken so far when she was startled to hear a woman in uniform ask if she could help take care of the baby. Due to her innate reserve, usually mistaken for shyness, it came naturally for her to protest, but the woman insisted and Mama was grateful to get a few minutes to herself. As she ate her dinner in the dining car of the train, she stared out at the sun setting over Illinois. She remembered the first time she moved away from home. After Mama graduated from high school in 1937, she went to Caruthersville to live with her Aunt Maude. Mama remembers Aunt Maude very well:

Aunt Maude. Aunt Maude Latimer. She's my aunt by marriage. She was married to my mother's brother LaFayette . We all called him Uncle Fayt. Mama called him Fayt. Aunt Lydie called him that. I think they may have even pronounced it LaFayt, but it isn't LaFayt, it's LaFayette, you know. But that was his name, LaFayette Latimer. No, he died before that. We were living in Braggadocio when he died. I went to his funeral, Rachel and I did, and Mama. He was a fairly young man. He was in his forties. He was awful sick, though. It was in the middle of the Depression, you know, the worst part of the Depression and he just left them destitute cause everybody around them was too, just about. But she worked at everything. She managed--they lived in that same house, you know, they'd lived for years. It was right on Ward Avenue. You know where Harold's store was? That's where her house was. She didn't live there then. Snuff. She was a very nice lady, nice manners, everything nice, but she had this terrible snuff habit³⁹ And you know, her mother

³⁹

Also know as chewing tobacco.

didn't do that. Her maiden name was Lusk. I met her Lusk relatives and they used to come there when I lived there. Her cousin--they were her cousins and they had a son who became my boyfriend for a while. He was a little put out when I got married. But he hadn't said anything about getting married and anyhow, I hadn't either, so I don't know why he got put out - none of his business. I guess he thought we had a thing going there, but I didn't hardly know anything about it--just somebody to go out with to me. He was smart and he was . . . they were better off than Aunt Maude, quite a bit. He had his own real nice car and all that stuff, you know. He got killed about the first year I was married, or second. He was going from Caruthersville to Hayti on that little narrow road, you know, along the levee and everybody just tried to drive as fast as they could through there and somebody pulled right out in front of him or got in his way or something and hit him head on--killed him right there. They were all so upset because he was their favorite. I remember the next day after I was married and he came over there and Creston wasn't there and I was at Maude's house getting my stuff together and he came up to me and he said, "I didn't even know you knew this fellow." I said, "Well, I did, I knew him, I've known him a long time." I didn't know it was important (to tell him) - I hadn't seen him in a long time, you know, I hadn't . . . I guess it was a little sudden, he thought it was. He says, "Well, I wish you'd told me." And I said, "Well, I didn't hardly know it myself." He was really put out about it! He never did get married--but he got killed. So I don't know, according to the way he was acting, I might have married a Lusk if Dad hadn't come back. That would have tickled Aunt Maude, she thought they were just great kinfolks. But I didn't really like him--he was just somebody to go with. As Patty Ann (Mama's sister Lucille's youngest daughter)says, he didn't ring my bells.

CHAPTER FIVE

To say Mama enjoyed being married and away from home was an understatement. Both she and Dad were oldest children and had worked hard all their lives caring for the younger ones, working around the house, and then working at jobs outside the home. Shortly after they married, they took in Mama's little brother Joe. He lived with Mama and Dad for more than three years after Mattie and Doc divorced (See Illustration 22, Appendix C).

Mama said that they were very happy when they finally had their own little house in Caruthersville. They bought a refrigerator and Mama painted the walls, and, she put curtains on all the windows. Dad had a car and, based on experience gained working in his Uncle Arch's garage, and with the tutoring of a kind neighbor, he learned to care for his own autos, a skill he used for the rest of his life.⁴⁰ Ever resourceful, he never hesitated to find a book or pamphlet of instructions for any task and became adept at repairing or building anything he set his mind to.

This extended to inventio--shades of his inventor father--by constantly analyzing every situation and formulating a better way to do it, fix it, store it,

⁴⁰

Creston Bruce, Interview. (1996)

dispose of it, or play with it. From his employment with Whirlpool Corporation in St. Joseph, Michigan, he has patents in his name from his work on clothes dryers.

Between the birth of my youngest child and my brother Gary's first child, is a space of twenty-three years. Therefore, Dad was eighty years old in 1994, when Hailey Elizabeth Bruce was born, soon to be followed by Erin Gail Bruce.

Dad set up an intercom system in the house so he and Mama could hear the grandchildren as they slept, rigged a cover over the basement door handle when they began to walk, hung a baby swing from the patio rafters and joined in the laughter and play-time to keep them amused.

Meanwhile, back to the start of their marriage: Mama's cousin Luther Kitchen and cousins Opal Latimer and Pauline Campbell encouraged Mama and Dad to join their little family group in St. Louis.

It was a new way of life for Mama and Dad. They and their cousins spent evenings walking to the movies or playing cards. They went on weekends to the ballpark to watch the St. Louis Browns, or, they ate dinner at one of the Italian restaurants that circled their area (known then as "Dago Hill").

The "Hill" they lived near was famous for its closely-knit Italian community, it's beautiful churches and it's personable and friendly people: it's most famous "sons" were baseball greats Yogi Berra and Joe Garagiola.

Once there were many Little Italies and Dago Hills; alas, they have grown fewer. Such has been the case in St. Louis,

Missouri. If an arbitrary event can trumpet the death of one Italian neighborhood and the renaissance of another, Hill Fiesta Day 1973 qualifies as such a date. How ironic that time and circumstances should intersect on that insufferably hot August day, marking one more summer of despair for Little Italy, another day in the neighborhood's march to destruction. The once-proud colony was on urban death row. It was not always so. For a time Little Italy glittered as one of St. Louis's ethnic jewels, succeeding but never replacing the glories of Kerry Patch and the Ghetto. In its heyday between the two world wars the enclave bristled with excitement: the cacophonous voices of street vendors boasting "Fish, Pesci freschi-- Che bella insalata!!" punctuated by the staccato machine-gunning of Egan's Rats or the scribblings of journalists such as Theodore Dreiser and Harry Rosencrans Burde.⁴¹

Mama remembers her years in St. Louis:

We had no problems in St. Louis. Now you can't walk there at all--can't leave your house hardly. We rode the buses and streetcars and I walked down the street to the movies at night and other people were walking along just like a small town. It was kind of like a small town, there where we were. And, we had grocery stores, drug stores, movie houses. I didn't live in the Italian section--that was where I worked. They had a war plant there, where they were making things for war. But, they were real nice people--extremely family-oriented and Catholic. And I don't know how they are now, but where I lived was on Page Boulevard--it was a real nice place--a nice, old part of the city--really well kept--and nice people there--doctors lived there and across the street there was an orphanage, Catholic orphanage and every day the nuns would come out and walk the small children around the neighborhood. And they were the kinds of nuns that wore--have you seen those pictures where the nuns wore those great big hats? [It] looked like they were going to fly off in the wind--that's what they had on. They were right across the street from us. And at the end of the street--if we could walk far enough--you entered university city--I used to push your baby carriage down near university city--and that's

⁴¹ Gary Ross Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill Italian-Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 1.

where the University of St. Louis was--part of the University of Missouri. And it was a whole different neighborhood--they had iron gates to the university city and, it always looked so pretty--it looked nice where we lived--we had big trees and houses like that, but, you couldn't get on the grounds because like I said, they had these iron gates and you had to live there or go to school there to go in. And, there was a grocery store down that direction too and my cousin Pauline and I walked down there a few times with her baby--she's pushing a baby carriage and I was walking along with her--we'd go to this grocery store and pass this university city gate. I'd like to have gone [to college], of course. We got into a pretty good section of St. Louis and it was safe to be there. But I took the bus to work all the time--or the streetcar--with my cousins and nobody bothered us. I suppose there was plenty of places where if you were a woman alone, you'd be in trouble, but we didn't do that, of course. Nobody got welfare. And, if you didn't work, you didn't eat. So they were all working--everybody was--that could. It was different. I don't think the depression changed it at all. I think the depression was good in a way because everybody--there was nothing going on--and nobody starved--you could get food. I don't think anybody starved anymore than they are now. They were losing their farms and their homes, a lot of them. And what brought jobs was the war! World War II moved here and after, everybody had a job--anybody that wanted one. Gary (Mama's son and my brother) calls Dad "old lucky" cause he always had a good job, which probably he wouldn't be able to do nowadays, you know.

Because of the war, they both found jobs quickly and settled into a routine. Mama continued talking about her St. Louis life:

Dad was working in St. Louis in a munitions plant. What is was, we were building ammunition, and planes, and tanks and everything you could think of to win the war. I picked up handfuls of big old bullets and put them in their boxes. Scared me to death, too. I didn't last very long at it because I didn't like it.

There was a large German population in St. Louis and had been since before the Civil War. At the close of World War II, one woman in particular was not happy about the German surrender. Mama relayed how she felt about her landlady:

And the landlady was somebody we knew because we lived two years in her house and she was from Germany and she didn't want Germany to lose. So while we were so happy with, you know, parading and cars honking and bells ringing and everything outside, why I said to her the war's over. She said, 'I'm afraid so.' I thought, 'You old German.' I know a lot of German people were nice, but they weren't well thought of then and she didn't help it with her attitude. We bought our groceries in a store owned by a Jewish man when we lived in St. Louis and, then, they would deliver your groceries, you know. Anywhere, people would deliver your groceries. And their teenage son, he'd drive their little pickup truck they had and he'd deliver my groceries and uh, she'd come upstairs and tell me, 'your groceries are here, Mrs. Bruce.' and I wondered why didn't he bring them upstairs? You know, that's what everybody else did when they had some. I went downstairs and he's standing on the porch. He says, 'Your German landlady won't let me in her house, you'll have to carry them up yourself, Mrs. Bruce.' And, I thought, 'Oh, for crying out loud--this is America!' I didn't even know he was Jewish! I said to him, 'I didn't know you were and it doesn't make a bit of difference to me.' And he said, 'Well, it does to your landlady.' That's what he said.

Dad and Mama named their first child Gwendolyn, (they thought a middle name was too much for such a small baby). Just a couple of months earlier, Mama remembers being carried by Dad and Cousin Luther up the ramps at St. Louis' Brown Stadium to watch the baseball game. They had fun and they were all optimistic about the future.

Since Dad was twenty-seven when the United States entered World War II, he was surprised to receive his army draft notice in the spring of 1944. That changed everything. He took his family back to Caruthersville so that Mama and I could be near Mama's family. Mama recalls going back to southeast Missouri:

You were seven months old when we left. And we left because Dad was drafted. He got his greetings from the government. And so, when he did that, he decided--he had no choice--he took you and me back to Caruthersville. He did manage to get gas somewhere and we drove back to Caruthersville and I held you all the way. We didn't have seat belts--we didn't know about seat belts or anything. And when we got there and they changed his age limit, like he (Creston) said and so then he had to get a job.

Back home he waited for his orders and Mama tells what it was like:

When he went there, he went to the induction site--wherever they send you to be in the infantry. And then they sent him home again and they didn't call him. I don't know why.

Dad was not called up right away after his "boot" camp training, and jobs were scarce in the that part of Missouri. The decision was made to move to Grand Haven, Michigan, where Mama's youngest sister, Lucille, lived with her husband Verlon and daughters Glenda and Patti Ann. They were there because of Verlon's family, all of whom had found jobs in Muskegon's war plants. Michigan in the 1940's was a favorite migrating area for southerners looking for work. Mama told me about the decision:

And Lucille said he [Dad] could get a job there [Michigan] and he got a job in Muskegon and looked for an apartment.

Dad went ahead and found a job in Muskegon, Michigan, a small city about fifteen miles north of Grand Haven along Lake Michigan. He rented a small apartment on Washington Street in Grand Haven. Now Mama was packing up her household items again and she and I would take the train north. I wasn't yet a year old yet and I was moving for the second time (See Illustration 23, Appendix C). Mama explained how the move went:

There was no work in Caruthersville. That's why we went north because Lucille and Tom were already here--Tom was working in Muskegon. And they said he [Dad] could get a job there, so he got on the train and went up there for a job. Yep, that was it, that's why everybody went. It was several weeks before I could go. We couldn't go, he had to find us an apartment first and that was really hard to do. He found this little three room apartment. I had to find somebody to move us from Caruthersville, Missouri to Grand Haven, Michigan. I had no idea how I was going to do that. I'll show you how easy it was [moving into the apartment]--you got somebody off the street and just said I'll give you a dollar to carry stuff upstairs [into the Grand Haven apartment].

Dad and Mama were not the only ones to go north in search of a better life: the population of Pemiscot County, Missouri rose from 37,284 in 1930 to 45,624 in 1950, a growth of 8,340; the population of Michigan's Ottawa County grew from 54,858 in 1930 to 73,751 in 1950, a growth of 18,903, a large difference that illustrated the lack of opportunity in southeastern Missouri after World War II. In a brochure titled, "National Register Sites," published by the city of Caruthersville, the author states that, "During and immediately after World War II there were more people per square mile than in any other county in the state. Population peaked in 1940 with 46, 847. It

don't know if he drove them to Muskegon or they walked the rest of the way, but that's how they got here.

Mama took the train north through St. Louis, through Chicago, through St. Joseph, Michigan and north into the future. As it turned out, she and Dad later became residents of St. Joseph and Dad retired there from Whirlpool Corporation. Mama talked about her train ride through Chicago:

Because when we got to Chicago I had to change trains and when I changed trains, Rachel had already told me what would happen when we got there--that I'd have to get a, well, it was like a taxi. But what he did was transport people from one station to another station and, it was night. And I still have this suitcase and you and the bottles and the diapers and the whole thing. And this one woman, she got mad, because the man who was driving the van--she wanted him to carry her suitcases. And he said, "I'm driving this car, but I don't carry suitcases. I don't get paid for suitcases." So they yelled at each other around there for a while, screamed and hollered, like New York. He didn't carry her suitcases, though. I didn't ask anybody to carry mine--nobody offered. I just had one but it was full. Well, it was night, I couldn't see anything and went through St. Joseph .

. . . When I am visiting the Grentz's (family friends in St. Joseph, Michigan)--they've got this train station right down below the bluff at their house - right between them and the lake. That's the same train track that you and I putt-putted through St. Joe. And every time I see one pass, I think there goes Allene and her baby. I do! Anyhow, when we got to Holland, they said, 'Everybody going to Grand Rapids, change trains.' I didn't even

know where Grand Rapids was--I never heard of it. I was sure glad I could stay put. Because it was night -I couldn't see anything or anything. So we stayed on the train and we were on there, you know, not very long, because Grand Haven's only twenty-five miles away.

CHAPTER SIX

Her sister, Lucille and Lucille's family were waiting for her at Grand Haven's little train station, not far from Mama's new apartment. Mama told me about our arrival:

When I got there, why there was Lucille and Tom and both the little girl -- at night -- they were waiting. Dad was working in Muskegon--he couldn't meet me. I went to her house and the next morning Dad got home from work and we went over there in a while and just as we got there, my truck arrived with the furniture.

And that's how Mama and I got to Michigan. I've heard the story many times and each time it brings back fond memories of trains and my childhood.

The upstairs apartment in Grand Haven that Dad found for us was on the main street, only half a block from the railroad tracks. Mama said she fell in love with Michigan:

I liked it--I liked it a lot and I thought from the very first that I would never live in Missouri again--and you can put that down. I know that Michigan has changed since then, but then, it seemed like everybody was so busy and the streets in Grand Haven were so clean and the yards were so beautiful, you remember? All those people were so neat and clean and hardworking and they were nice people. Oh, I didn't like the heat [in Missouri]. Yes,

⁴⁰ Leonard L. Chase, *Three Great Lakes*, Ed. Ernest Jones, 199.

CHAPTER SIX

In the summer of 1944, Mama saw Grand Haven, Michigan for the first time. The land looked greener, the sky looked bluer, and the lake breeze brought relief on all but the hottest days. There were flowers and plants of all kinds everywhere--in peoples' front yards and even along the main street and through the city park.

... Michigan is a pleasant peninsula, or peninsulas, for there are two of them - the only State of the Union boasting a spare part. It is a land of undulating hills, spendthrift in wildflowers. Save for desolate stretches of cut-over timber land with its yellow dunes, and on the north Superior - blue waters, cold and beautiful.⁴³

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⁴³

Leonard L. Cline, *These United States*, Ed. Daniel Borus, 180.

I'm pretty sure I thought that was one of the reasons-- everybody feels more energetic in a cool climate. But I came in early June--and we came from Missouri where it was so hot when I left there and the humidity was like taking a bath--like hot water. And I remember very well next morning, we went over to the apartment that Dad rented. That was Washington Street.

Dad worked at Continental Motors in Muskegon, Michigan, for a year before the Army called him to service. The U.S. Army assigned him to a position as supply clerk with the Aberdeen Ordnance Corps in Maryland (See Map 3, Appendix A). The Maryland facility is still operational and includes the U.S. Army Ordnance Museum. The "Flaming Bomb" insignia identifies those whose responsibility it is to issue supplies to troops in the field.⁴⁴

Mama and I took another long train ride in 1946, this time to visit Dad at Aberdeen. The train was either the Pennsylvania Railroad or the Baltimore & Ohio.⁴⁵

The Aberdeen Ordnance Corps was "a link between America's industrial complex and her fighting men and women throughout the world."⁴⁶ The family visit wasn't much of a vacation for any of them. When Dad and his buddy [whose trailer it was] left for day duty, Mama had to take me with her on a short commuter train to a nearby town for groceries. Each evening she made dinner for everyone. It was an exhausting and stressful experience.

⁴⁴ Brochure, U.S. Army Ordnance Museum, Maryland

⁴⁵ National Headquarters of the Nickel Plate Road Historical & Technical Society. Brochure

⁴⁶ Brochure U.S. Army Ordnance Museum, Maryland

She said she was never so glad to get home again--Grand Haven looked even better on her second arrival!

Shortly, Dad was sent with his unit to the Pacific, specifically the island of Saipan (See illustration 24, Appendix C). There had been fierce battles on Saipan and enemy troops were still hiding in the hills.

His unit was assigned to "clean up" the island. The day Dad arrived, a large contingent of Japanese surrendered. The remaining time on Saipan consisted of attempts to persuade the remaining enemy that the war was over and that they could safely surrender.

Financially, it was a very difficult time for them. Dad cut his fellow soldiers' hair and sent the money home to Mama. Mama recalled the time when he was gone:

Well, Dad didn't get home for a long time after that. He sent pictures of bones of skeletons found in the caves. They (Japanese soldiers) died in there. They (Dad and his unit) had an easy life over there, but it's just that they wanted to come home. He came home when you were not quite three years old. He picked you up and carried you home. He brought us presents--I can't remember what he brought for you, but he brought me a beautiful silk scarf from Chicago. I don't remember--isn't that awful?--probably a doll. (Dad) was gone a year--he was at Continental Motors one year. The war wasn't over--it wasn't over until he was overseas. We kept hearing for days that it was over [in the Pacific Theater]--I heard it on radio. I ran outside--went downstairs first to tell the people if they had heard it--and they had. And so we walked out on the porch - we had a front porch and my goodness, within an hour you couldn't even get down the street. People came in from outside town, and they were bumper to bumper in cars, honking, everybody was walking down the street and finally, you couldn't even walk

down the street. Well, that's the way it was. They were hollering, laughing, partying, having a great time. I never will forget it--I was just standing out there on the sidewalk watching the whole thing, holding you. You couldn't even walk downtown--the streets were so packed. The war was over!

I remember when Dad came home from the Pacific. According to Mama, I had embarrassed her while Dad was gone by calling other men "Daddy" in public places. The evening he arrived by train, we met him at the station. He seemed, to a tiny girl, a tall and handsome person. I still vividly remember his army uniform and hat. He picked me up and carried me home down the railroad tracks to our apartment, Mama walking alongside. I was only three and one-half years old, but it's a memory I'll cherish forever (See illustration 25, Appendix C).

Mama, Dad, and I settled into life in our new town (See illustration 26, Appendix C). The Reverend William M. Ferry founded Grand Haven, Michigan on November 23, 1834. Actually, there are three towns at this site: Grand Haven, Spring Lake, and Ferrysburg, all nestled at the mouth of the Grand River where it flows into Lake Michigan. The harbor has always been its greatest asset, first as an industrial site and now as a resort area. In 1945, the history of Grand Haven included the following description of the harbor:

The outer harbor is 422 feet wide and 21 feet deep. The inner harbor is maintained at a 200-foot width and a 21-foot depth...The harbor of Grand Haven has handled considerable tonnage. In years past the annual tonnage has been well over 3,000,000. Last year Grand Haven Harbor handled approximately 2, 500,000 tons of commerce. It's tonnage in the

years to come should increase considerably, as the harbor services a large area.⁴⁷

It wasn't long before I was standing on the sidewalk near our first apartment with the neighbor children waving to the engineer and caboose man as the New York Central made it's rounds from Chicago to Detroit and back again.

Dad went back to Continental Motors in Muskegon, progressing rapidly to test engineer in the army tank proving grounds. Dad knows now that it might have been possible to go to college on the G.I. Bill, even with his little family. We were now four--Gary Jonathan was born on September 12, 1953. I was almost ten years old (See Illustration 27, Appendix C).

Back then, Dad's overriding concern was for making a living wage. His strong suit has always been tenacity, and fear of uncertainty kept him from attending college. He excelled at his work in Muskegon, and it was this experience that led to an offer from Whirlpool Corporation in St. Joseph, Michigan. In 1957, without a formal degree, he was hired as a technician to test new lines of washing machines. He remained in that line of work until his retirement at the age of 65 in 1978. Mama told me the reason for their choices at the time:

The kind of job he had--Dad's kicked himself over and over many times--and so could I--he could have gone to college on the G.I. Bill and he didn't do it. Why didn't we do that? I don't know what that was. I could have kept other people's kids and

⁴⁷

Grand Haven, 1945 City Directory, 16.

paid for our groceries and stuff. I never even thought of it. Why is that? He had a good job waiting for him so he just took it. We'd been out on our own--we didn't have to worry. We'd been on our own before that. He left home when he was 19 and he'd been working and giving all his money to his mother since he was fourteen. He had me and you and felt responsible for us too--that's what I think it was. And he thought he was supposed to come home and go to work--that's what he did. Went to work at Continental Motors in Muskegon--and they made him a foreman! You know, that's a great job for somebody like that. Then they put them in this program teaching him test engineering. He was one of the first ones--they tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'you're it.' That's how he got into Whirlpool. And when he was in the CC's and when he was overseas, he was the supply clerk--he took care of everything like that and made out the payrolls and everything in CC's. But it was wasted there. He should have gotten out and studied and worked at the same time.

Gary and I had a traditional childhood with a stay-at-home mother. In retrospect, she admits that she patterned herself after her grandmaw. Like Florence, she doted on her children, she spoiled her grandchildren, and she made her home into the family haven that it still is today. Close family ties, good manners, behaving in public, and dressing "decently"--these are her hallmarks, and in spite of some childish rebellion, these values were also instilled in her descendants.

Dad has set a high example of civility, creativity, and diligence. The very qualities that attracted Mama when she was sixteen years old are the same qualities that Dad has carried with him his entire life: a steely tenacity tempered in the trials of his own childhood. He has never given up his sense

of obligation to his children either--they can always count on him. My brother

Gary has this to say about Dad:

I've never heard Dad say one bad word about any person--even the people who've been the meanest to him in this world. And I've never heard him say anything bad about anybody and I don't think he has an enemy anywhere.

Mama and Dad bought their first house outside Grand Haven. My childhood was spent in a sunny little two-story house that included my Cocker Spaniel, Sandy. On Saturday night, I usually got my way when I begged to stay up. Dad and Mama were seated in front of the radio laughing at the antics of Minnie Pearl on the Grand Ol' Opry ("Howdeee! I'm just so proud to be here"), broadcast live every Saturday night from Wyman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee. The late 1940's: no television, no malls, no pizza delivery, no answering machines, no cellular phones, the radio housed in the big wood cabinet.

Mama listened to *The Arthur Godfrey Show* every morning and she and Dad listened to *Gunsmoke*, *Amos 'n Andy*, *Fibber McGee and Molly*, and *The Red Skelton Show* in the evenings. People in the late 1940's America wanted steady good-paying jobs, a home, a car and some promise of future security. Radio contributed to that feeling by bringing the family around the radio in the evening. There was something for everyone. Beginning in the early 30's, radio provided comedy, Western dramas, detective shows, and "soap" operas (so called because they usually had a soap maker as a sponsor).

It might be looked upon as a naive era, but people were striving to live the good life and give their children the things they missed out on during the Depression. That generation came through the bad economic times and then fought a war all around the globe. They had come through as the victors. They had survived and persevered and were proud of their country's accomplishments.

Radio programs of the era reflected that new optimism. Comedy or drama, they always ended with a lesson for life, with the miscreant set straight and the good characters in control. In *Don't Touch That Dial*," J. Fred MacDonald comments that, "As a democratic republic, the United States was established, populated, and maintained by relatively simple and hard-working middle-class people who demanded similar qualities in their entertainment."⁴⁸ American radio before the Korean War, before the Vietnam War, had something for everybody: "For fans of country and western music, there was *The Grand Ole Opry*. For opera fans, the Metropolitan Opera, presented by Texaco, was a Saturday-afternoon tradition. The *Lux Radio Theater* presented Hollywood's leading actors and actresses in plays by well-known writers."⁴⁹

Dad brought a television home when I was around eight years of age. It transformed our lives as it did everyone's.

⁴⁸ J. Fred MacDonald, *Don't Touch That Dial!* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1970), 90.

⁴⁹ Norman H. Finkelstein, *Sounds in the Air: The Golden Age of Radio*, (New York: Charles Scribner, 1993), 17.

The emergence of television in the postwar era was a mixed blessing. In some ways it was complement to radio. Many considered TV an extension of radio broadcasting, some calling it 'sight radio,' 'radio optics,' 'radio moving pictures,' and 'radio vision.'" Many programs in 1945 and 1946 were simply adaptations of radio series, and most TV programs were the same types of shows that radio had utilized. In this regard, television's primitive quiz, dramatic, audience participation, and comedy telecasts were not unfamiliar to radio listeners.⁵⁰

Radio and television, notwithstanding, our values were learned at home. Mama and Dad tried to instill in Gary and I the same values that they learned from their families: honesty, trustworthiness, tolerance, the rewards of industriousness, and above all, the overwhelming need for education. At a critical time in our nation's history, they persevered: they completed high school when many did not or could not, they moved beyond their own disappointments and, they optimistically began a life away from their families.

From the beginning, Gary and I heard the word college nearly every day--it was, as Mama said, a foregone conclusion. She never questioned the how, she just knew that it would be.

As a seventeen-year old freshman, I attended Lake Michigan College, a community college in Benton Harbor, Michigan; then, I went on to a Bachelor's degree at Western Michigan University. Soon after, I married and had two children,

⁵⁰

MacDonald, *Don't Touch That Dial!* 84.

Christine Lynne Rubleske and Joseph Bruce Rubleske. And, Mom and Dad were right--the college education opened doors for me that otherwise would not have opened. It opened my mind and motivated me toward further education. I, too, preached the value of an education and both of my children have master's degrees. Chris' degree is in geography from the University of Toledo and she is married to Mark Schlutt, whom she met in St. Joseph; Joe's degree is in environmental management from Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis and he is married to the former Janet Hamilton of Indianapolis. This story is for them because they deserve to know how their grandparents came to be the people they loved.

My brother Gary went on to Cooley Law School in Lansing, Michigan and has served as an assistant prosecuting attorney in Berrien County (St. Joseph, Michigan). He is now in private practice as a criminal lawyer and making a bid for a judgeship. We are all certain of a positive outcome.

In an interview with Gary, he specified the difference between our parents and others that we knew of:

I'll tell you where they were different than the other parents, is that they told, and I assume they told you the same thing, they told me from day one what I was going to do. It was going to be college and something beyond college. It was going to be something beyond college. It was graduate school, medical school or law school. Most of the kids in the neighborhood, their

your chin up, and you don't sell yourself short; be yourself, don't hold grudges, and always treat others as you would like to be treated--always.

Gary, when asked what values he believes he received from them and strives to live by, replied:

To not sell yourself out--you have to be what you are, and be honest about it, and not try to convince every person that you're not something you're not. And I don't know a real good way to put that, but, well, I see a lot of lawyers running around talking on their cell phones and trying to put on a big show of what they are, and so on and so forth, and I don't believe in that. I'd rather just get my respect from what I have done and not from what people think I am or what, and obviously, lots and lots of people get it from what their parents were. On the one hand, sometimes I wish I'd had more opportunities if they had known more people; but, on the other hand, I can also say that everything I got, I got because of them or because of myself--I didn't have anybody to help me with that and I find myself resentful of people who had things handed to them. And I have a real hard time with that. I'm sure I got that from them, because Mom and Dad had absolutely nothing. They had to get everything that they had and the fact that Dad could end up at Whirlpool, with a good retirement and a lot of respect. And knowing a lot of Whirlpool people now, I can tell you that would not happen in 1996.⁵²

And, so, Gary and I grew up in Michigan because of Mama and Dad. They are descendants of the Latimers, the Ledfords, the Borroughs, the Bruces, and the Kerseys. Fellow family members and their spouses and children are spread all over the country now; however, it hasn't been that long when the center of the family was the dark, rich farmland of southeast Missouri.

⁵² Bruce Interview (1996)

Mama and Dad celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary in August of 1998. They can reflect on lives lived with integrity and fortitude. I will certainly reflect on the laughter that sustained us, the hardships that tested us, and the love that cemented us as a family (See Illustration 29, Appendix C).

MISSOURI TRIP 1996

On a trip to Caruthersville, Missouri, in June of 1996, I was reminded once again of the hypnotic effect the town has on me—as soon as I get near it, my childhood comes rushing back in waves of memory. The relatives are all as they were in, say, 1950, the sun is very hot, and we are all tired and hungry after our long drive down from Michigan.

For this trip, the first without Mama and Dad, I left South Bend, Indiana at 6:00 a.m., and drove the six hundred miles in one day. After dropping off my sister-in-law, Margaret Freeman, in south central Illinois (Marion, the heart of "Little Egypt"), I continued on for two more hours down U.S. highways 55 and 57. It was the first time I had driven across the Mississippi River alone and the child in me wanted to stop and take in that gargantuan brown river. Instead, I drove slowly, and probably somewhat critically, as I craned to get a good look at the "mighty Mississipp."

The water looked very high (it had been an exceptionally rainy spring). I knew that it was a dangerous river—deep and unpredictable because of its

⁵² Bruce. Interview. (1996)

as it pours south from Minnesota to Louisiana. The Missouri and Ohio Rivers both flow into it as it moves south. By the time it reaches The Missouri-Arkansas border, my family's "home", it's very wide.

EPILOGUE

MISSOURI TRIP 1996

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The water looked very high (it had been an exceptionally rainy spring). I knew that it was a dangerous river--deep and unpredictable because of its ever-changing currents. The Mississippi's treacherous current increases speed

as it pours south from Minnesota to Louisiana. The Missouri and Ohio Rivers both flow into it as it moves south. By the time it reaches The Missouri-Arkansas border, my family's "home", it's very wide.

After I crossed the Mississippi at Cairo, Illinois (pronounced with a long "a"), the sky darkened and suddenly I was in the middle of a southern downpour. Residents of Michigan and Indiana think they've seen heavy rain; but, unless they've been south and seen the sky open up with a deluge of water, they haven't really seen rain! My car hydroplaned on the shallow river of water that was now a highway, and my windscreen wipers were useless against the onslaught. Pulling off to the side of the road was not a option, mainly because I couldn't see the shoulder of the road, and, the drivers behind me probably couldn't see me.

After one of the most exhausting drives I've ever made, I pulled into the Hatfield Inn in Caruthersville. Determined to make only one trip with my baggage through the thundering rain, I staggered through the front door and was greeted by a genuine American Southern accent--or at least, the southeastern Missouri version. The night manager was solicitous and comforting and I felt that my harrowing entry into Caruthersville was duly appreciated.

It didn't take much courage not to go first to the home of a relative. When I called them from my hotel room, they expressed horror that I would choose an impersonal hotel over their generous hospitality. I dearly would

have loved to see them at that moment, but I knew I was way past tired and incapable of even the scantiest greetings. In fact, it was rather nice being alone for a while, and when I was rested the next morning, I drove through Caruthersville to Uncle Joe and Aunt Veila's house.

Uncle Joe and his daughter, Sheila, were in the driveway waiting for me. Uncle Joe "favors" my mother, with the same soft brown eyes. His hair is now silver, but the welcome is as warm as ever. Sheila, like her mother, Veila, is a very warm and friendly person. They always make me feel welcome and comfortable.

After a generous breakfast with Joe and Veila, and after trading the latest family news, I left for town. Downtown Caruthersville looks the same to me as it did thirty years ago. The only additions are a Wall-Mart at the entrance to town and the new gambling casino on the river and across the street from the aforementioned Hatfield Inn. Caruthersville was built right on the Mississippi River. If, theoretically, you drove east on Main Street over the levee, you'd drive into the river.

The gambling casino is new to these times, but in the nineteenth century, the town had a bad reputation for drinking and gambling. The farmers and the town business leaders reformed the area and soon Baptist and Methodist churches outnumbered the bars. It wasn't until years of hard times that the casino was built just a couple of years ago with the promise of jobs and prosperity.

My grandmother Clara Bruce played the piano at the Baptist church on Ward Avenue--it still stands. My grandmother Mattie Ledford attended the Church of Christ. Clara Bruce died at the age of ninety-seven and Mattie Ledford at the age of ninety-eight, about ten years apart.

Both lived through the turn of the century, World War I, the Great Depression and World War II. They were old ladies by the time the 60's social revolution came along and they were in their eighties during the Vietnam War.

Joe took me to the courthouse and introduced me to my cousin David's wife, who happens to work in the records office. She immediately said I "favored" Grandmaw Mattie Ledford, which I took as a flattering remark. She was also --typically--helpful. Together we found old marriage records bound in huge books that lined the walls of a small room. All of Pemiscot County's people were in that one room. Births, marriages, deaths--all recorded and tucked away in a courthouse built in the last century. Unlike St. Joseph, Michigan, there is no modern courthouse in Caruthersville. This one is red brick and looks like most other old courthouses in small towns across America.

That evening, Uncle Joe and Aunt Veila surprised me by having more relatives over for dinner. Aunt Rachel drove from Steele--it was so good to see her after so many years. And, Uncle Joe and Aunt Veila's son Joe brought over his young son.

My second morning there, Uncle Joe took me to the two cemeteries where my grandmothers were buried. We both got teary-eyed, but it was a

cathartic experience. I'm glad I was with Uncle Joe--there's a real comforting quality about his presence. He doesn't say much, but I know that when he says something, its going to be honest and straightforward. He said he found my research work (writing about the family) interesting, but there wasn't much about that early time that he cared to remember. He said its easier to just not think about it if you don't have to.⁵³

Later in the day, I packed up and drove a few blocks away to Uncle Harold (Dad's brother) and Aunt Virginia's house. It was also wonderful to see them and they welcomed me very warmly as they always do.

After chatting about families, Uncle Harold took us to dinner at the restaurant within the gambling complex. My memories of them includes many trips to fine restaurants where Uncle Harold always insisted that his guests order whatever they like.

The dining room's large windows allowed a view of the Mississippi. It's not like looking out at Lake Michigan--clear and sometimes a glistening blue in the sunlight, with rolling waves lapping onto a sandy shore. No, the Mississippi River is brown--it looks just like the "Big Muddy", its nickname. That day, it looked wide and deep and calm. It did not look like a body of water that a person would jump into for fun. I remembered that many years before, on a flight north from Memphis, Tennessee, to Chicago, Illinois, I was seated on the west side of the plane. Through the window on my left, I could

⁵³ Joe Ledford. Interview. (1996)

see the Mississippi River. It looks like a long, brown ribbon that someone discarded, thrown across the country.

As we dined, a flat barge drifted down river, low in the water because of its weight. It's a working river--a highway that serves the same purpose it has since our country was new.

The third morning, I said good-bye to Uncle Harold and Aunt Virginia and drove north out of town. I knew it would probably be a long time before I saw them, or Caruthersville, again.

It's more important than ever that I finish this story. The descendants are spread out across the United States now and the cousins don't communicate except at funerals. I guess we'll always feel a kinship, but it's not the same as when we visited years ago.

What happens when the older generation is gone? A great void will take their place and the cousins and I will only have our memories. We'll each, in our own way, have to make new traditions, and, make renewed vows of kinship for the future.

Good-bye, Uncle Joe.

November 1997

Addendum to Epilogue:

Uncle Joe died in the fall of 1997 after a lengthy battle with diabetes. After he was hospitalized in early October, I sent him a card and told him that I loved him and that he was often in my thoughts. Then, when Mama and Dad went to Missouri to say good-bye to him, he told Mama to tell me to watch my diet and take good care of myself.

I will miss him very much. For a long time, I kept his voice on my answering machine so that I could hear him whenever I wanted. I'm sorry that I'll never hear his voice again. And, Mama, of course, will be hard hit by this--he was her baby brother and she helped raise him. Now both of her brothers are gone.

It's more important than ever that I finish this story. The descendants are spread out across the United States now and the cousins don't communicate except at funerals. I guess we'll always feel a kinship, but it's not the same as when we visited years ago.

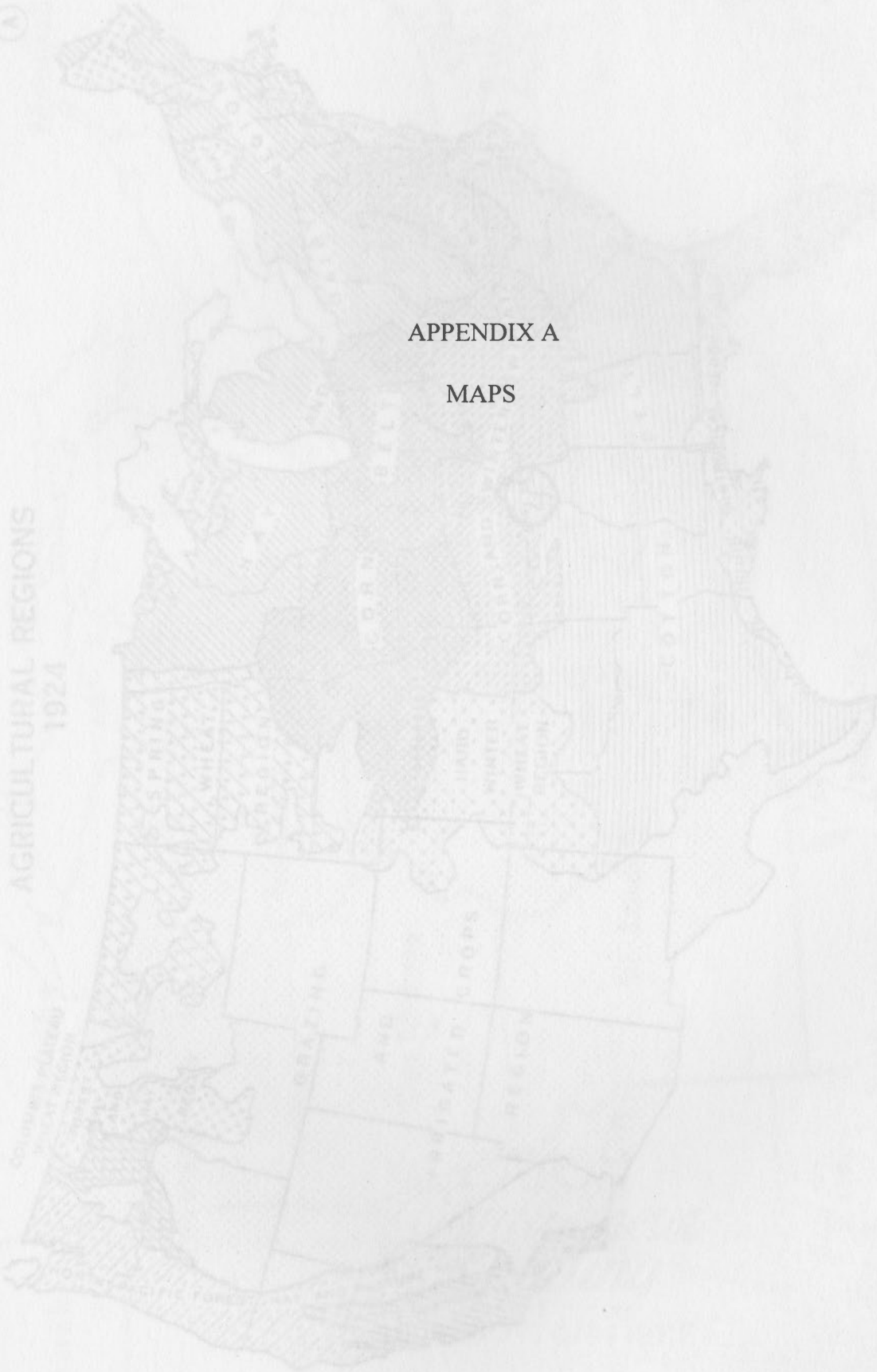
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Good-bye, Uncle Joe.

November 1997.

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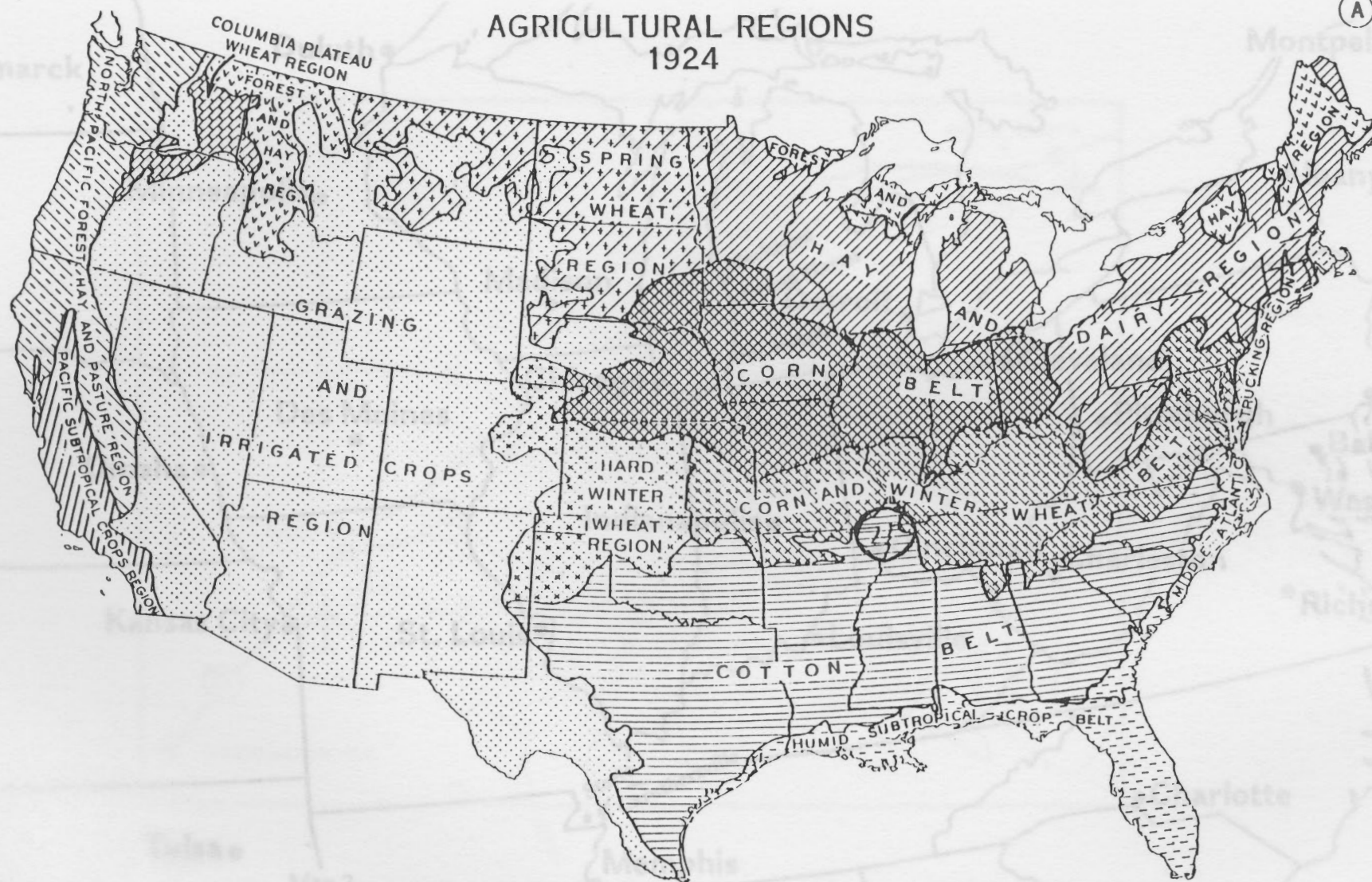
AGRICULTURAL REGIONS 1924



APPENDIX A

MAPS

Map of the United States that demonstrates the agricultural regions as they were in 1924. The map shows that the central and western United States was a major producer of wheat and corn, while the southern United States was a major producer of cotton. The map also shows the distribution of other crops such as sugar beets and fruit.



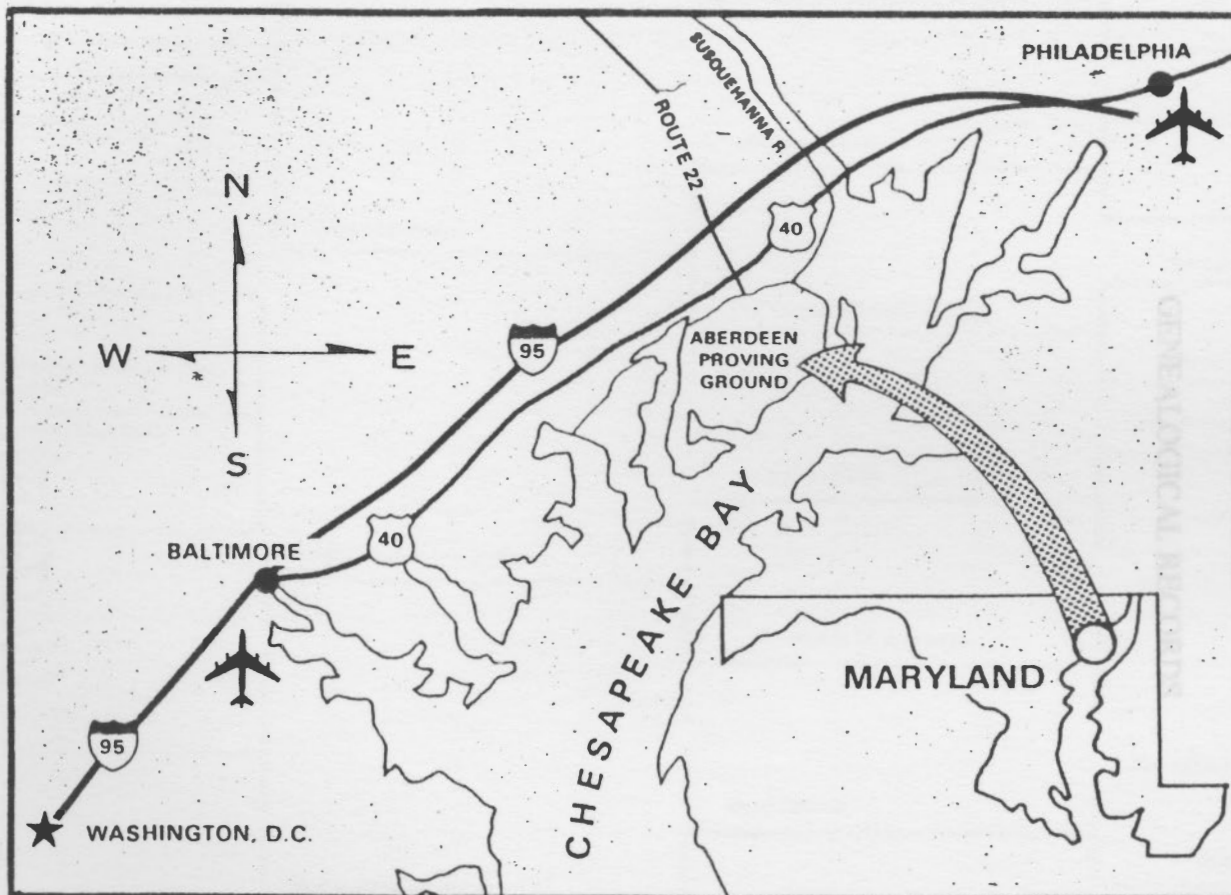
Map 1

A map of the United States that demonstrates the agricultural regions as they were in 1924. Note that the rich land of Missouri's Bootheel (circled) was a cotton-producing area. From the *Historical Atlas of the United State Centennial Edition*, published by National Geographic, 1988.



Map 2

A map showing the states of Missouri and Michigan. In Missouri, the towns of Caruthersville and Steele are marked at their location in the Bootheel. In Michigan, the towns of Grand Haven, Muskegon, and St. Joseph are marked at their sites along Lake Michigan. From the *Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States* by Charles O. Paullin with the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

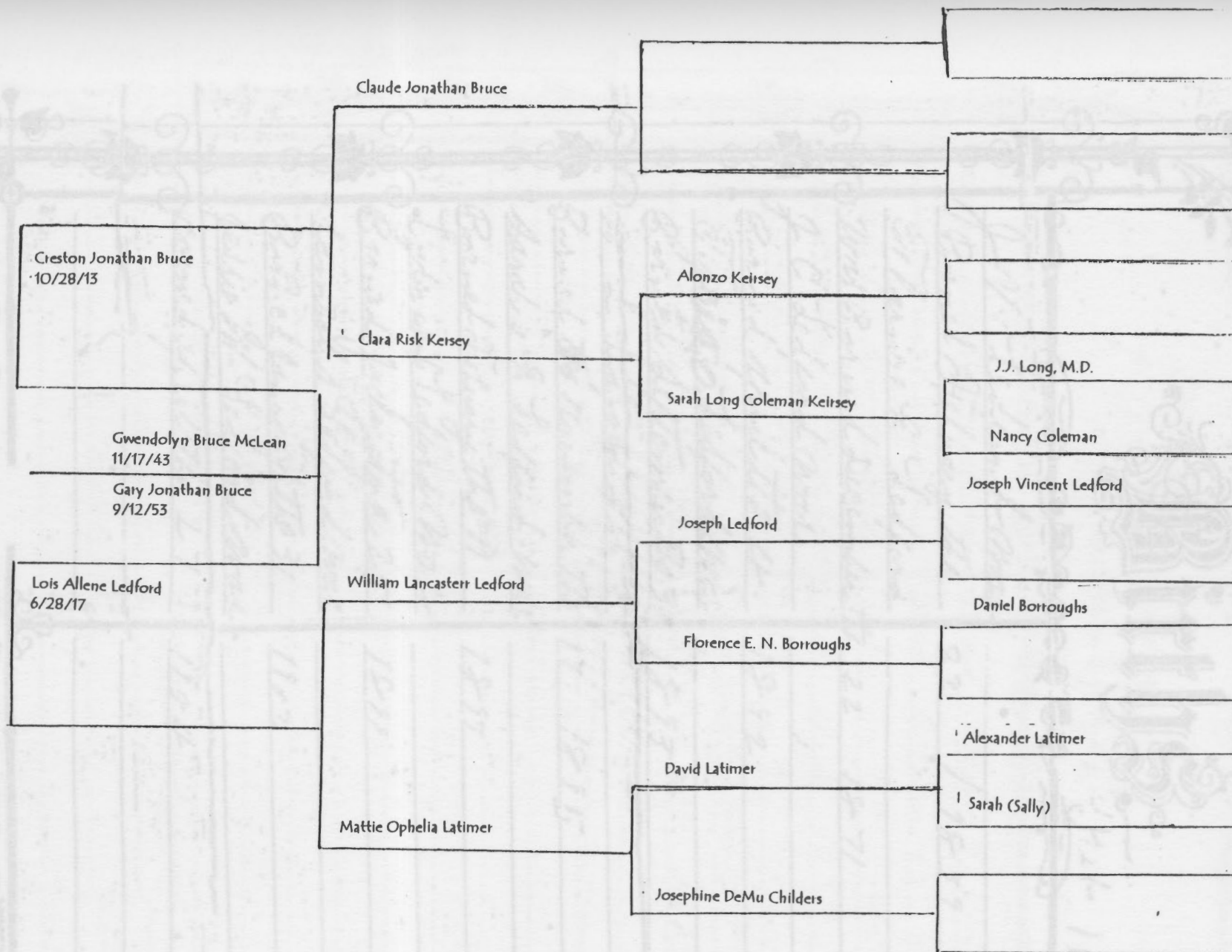


Map 3

A map that shows the U.S. Army's Aberdeen Proving Ground. Distributed in a brochure by the U. S. Army Ordnance Museum, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.

APPENDIX B

GENEALOGICAL RECORDS



GENEOLOGY CHART

Compiled by: Gwen McLean
Date: February 1996

Births

Feb. 18

J. W. Sedford was

Borned February the

22 / 1859

Esth. Maria G. Sedford

was Borned December the

22 1871

J. C. Sedford was

Borned April the 4

1872

Eugene Sedford was

Borned September the 3

1873

~~John L. Sedford was~~

Borned the November the

17 1875

Sarah G. Sedford was

Borned February the 11

1877

Lydian M. Sedford was

Borned July the 25

1878

Lamont A. Sedford was

Borned January the 31

1873

Lessie M. Sedford was

Borned April the 17

1874

Deaths

Joseph Vincent Ledford	Died, March 9, 1932
Samuel Swaine Ledford	Died October 22, 1940
Jess M Ledford	Died - 1955
Florance Ledford Barnes	Died Sept 1959
Carmie Ledford	Died Jan 9 - 1968
Ozell Ledford	Died Sept ^{Feb} 18, 1976
W. L. Ledford	Died Feb - 15, 1975
Sarah E. Ledford	Died Nov 8 -

Family Register

GRANDPARENTS



Joseph Vernon Leford

GRANDFATHER (Father's Side)

Joseph Vernon Leford

Date of Birth

Feb 22-1859

Date of Death

May - 9 - 1932

GRANDMOTHER (Father's Side)

Glarence Esterlee Leford

Date of Birth

Dec 22-1871

Date of Death

Sept 3-1959

GRANDFATHER (Mother's Side)

John David Latimer

Date of Birth

Dec, 13-1858

Date of Death

March 16-1927

GRANDMOTHER (Mother's Side)

Josephine Latimer

Date of Birth

June 12-1857

Date of Death

Jan 12-1916

PARENTS



April 4, 1915
DATE

Married
WHERE

William Landcaster Leford

HUSBAND

Nov-17-1895

Date of Birth

Cerro Gordo Tenn

Place of Birth

Feb 17-1895

Date of Death

Feb 15, 1975

Where

High mo

Where Buried

Steele mo, mtzion cemetery

Mattie Ophelia Latimer

WIFE

Feb 26, 1897

Date of Birth

Union City Tenn

Place of Birth

Feb 26-1897

Date of Death

Where

Where Buried

Union City Tenn

Children's Registered

Lais Aline Ledford

Remarks: Brown hair
brown eyes #5 ft 4 in
weight 118

Date of Birth	Where
<u>June 28, 1917</u>	<u>Steele mo.</u>
Date Married	Where
<u>August 24, 1937</u>	<u>Paruthersville mo</u>
To Whom	
<u>Creston G. Bruce</u>	
Date of Death	Where

Rachel Esterlee Ledford

Remarks: Brown hair
brown eyes #5-5 in
weight 118

Date of Birth	Where
<u>Jan 31 - 1919</u>	<u>Steele mo</u>
Date Married	Where
<u>Dec 4, 1938</u>	<u>Steele mo</u>
To Whom	
<u>Roy L. Barnes</u>	
Date of Death	Where

William Allen Ledford

Remarks: Light brown hair
brown eyes
#5-8-

Date of Birth	Where
<u>Nov 15 - 1920</u>	<u>Steele mo</u>
Date Married	Where
<u>August 11 - 1942</u>	<u>Yuma Arizona</u>
To Whom	
<u>Marjine Howard</u>	<u>Steele mo</u>
Date of Death	Where
<u>March 5, 1974</u>	<u>Denton Tenn</u>
<u>Buried at Steele mo mt zion cemetery</u>	

Lucille Ledford

Remarks: Blk hair
Brown eyes #5 ft 4 in
weight 117

Date of Birth	Where
<u>April 13, 1922</u>	<u>Steele mo</u>
Date Married	Where
<u>Dec 24 - 1940</u>	<u>Caruthersville mo</u>
To Whom	
<u>Nelson Denton</u>	<u>Steele mo</u>
Date of Death	Where

Joseph David Ledford

Remarks: Light brown hair
blue eyes #5 ft 8 in
weight 185

Date of Birth	Where
<u>Jan 19 - 1931</u>	<u>Steele mo</u>
Date Married	Where
_____	_____
To Whom	

Date of Death	Where

MARRIAGE LICENSE, PEMISCOT COUNTY, MO.

STATE OF MISSOURI, }
COUNTY OF PEMISCOT. } ss.

THIS LICENSE AUTHORIZES any Judge of a Court of Record, or Justice of the Peace, or any Licensed or Ordained Preacher of the Gospel, who is a citizen of the United States, or a resident of and pastor of some Church in this State, to SOLEMNIZE MARRIAGE between Creston Bruce of Caruthersville in the County of Pemiscot and State of Missouri who is over the age of twenty-one years; and Alene Ledford of Caruthersville in the County of Pemiscot and State of Missouri who is over the age of eighteen years.

WITNESS my hand as Recorder of Deeds, with the seal of office hereto affixed, at my office in Caruthersville, Missouri, this 12 day of Aug. 1938
By J. W. Green Deputy. Recorder of Deeds.
(SEAL)

STATE OF MISSOURI, }
COUNTY OF Pemiscot } ss.

This is to certify that the undersigned Minister of the Gospel did, at Caruthersville in said County, on the 12 day of Aug., A. D. 1938, unite in Marriage the above named persons, and I further certify that I am a citizen of the United States and a resident pastor of First Baptist Church Caruthersville Missouri, legally qualified under the laws of the State of Missouri, to solemnize Marriages.

D. K. Foster

Filed for record on the 12th day of Sept. A. D. 1938
By J. W. Green Deputy. Recorder of Deeds.

APPENDIX C

ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1

On the right, Alice Ledford at two years of age,
with her sister Rachel, eighteen months younger.



Illustration 1

On the right, Allene Ledford at two years of age, with her sister Rachel, eighteen months younger.

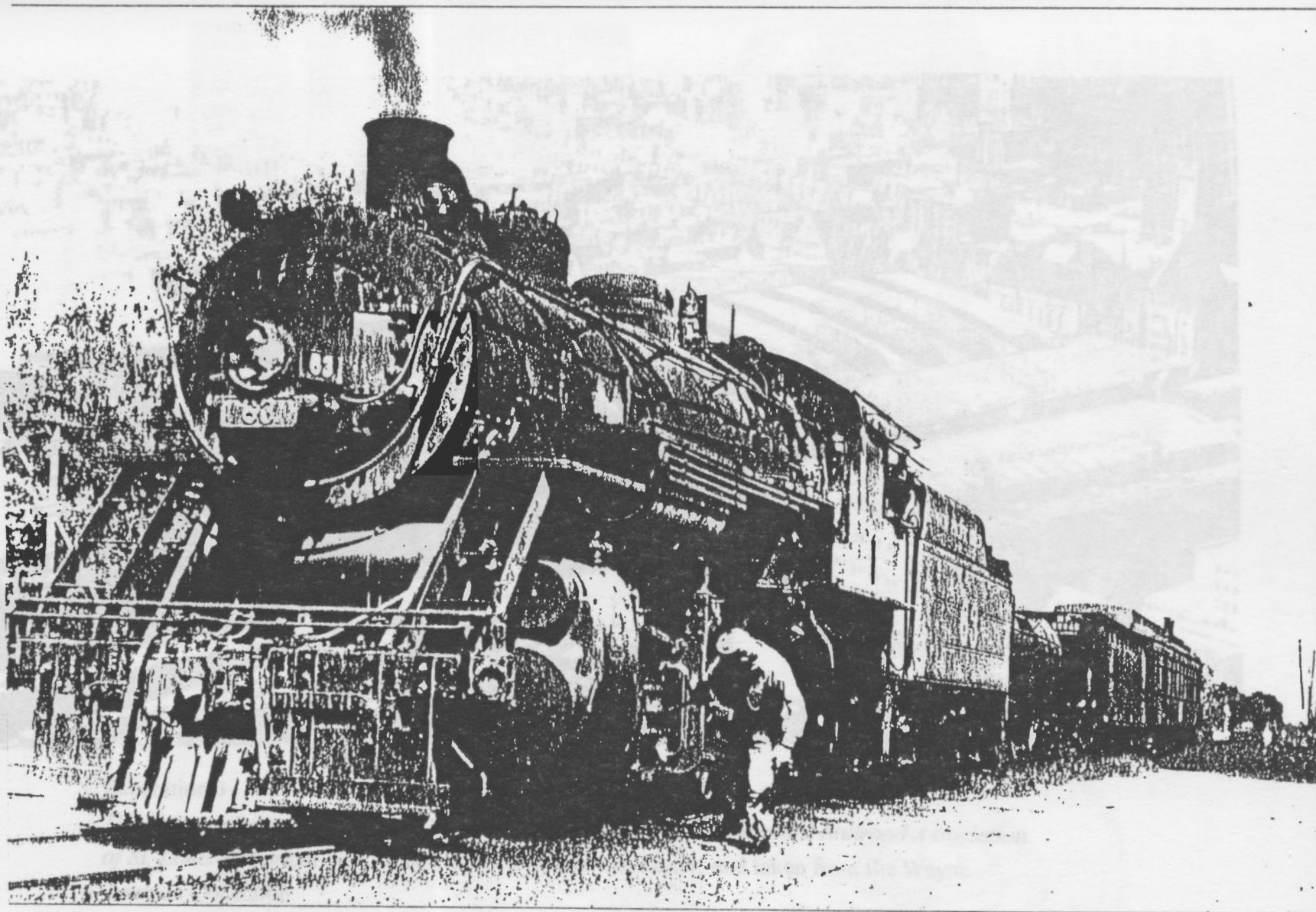


Illustration 2

This train, photographed in 1948, and pictured in the *Missouri Pacific Historical Society Calendar* of 1994, is typical of those that Mama rode in 1944 on her trip from Hayti to St. Louis, Missouri.

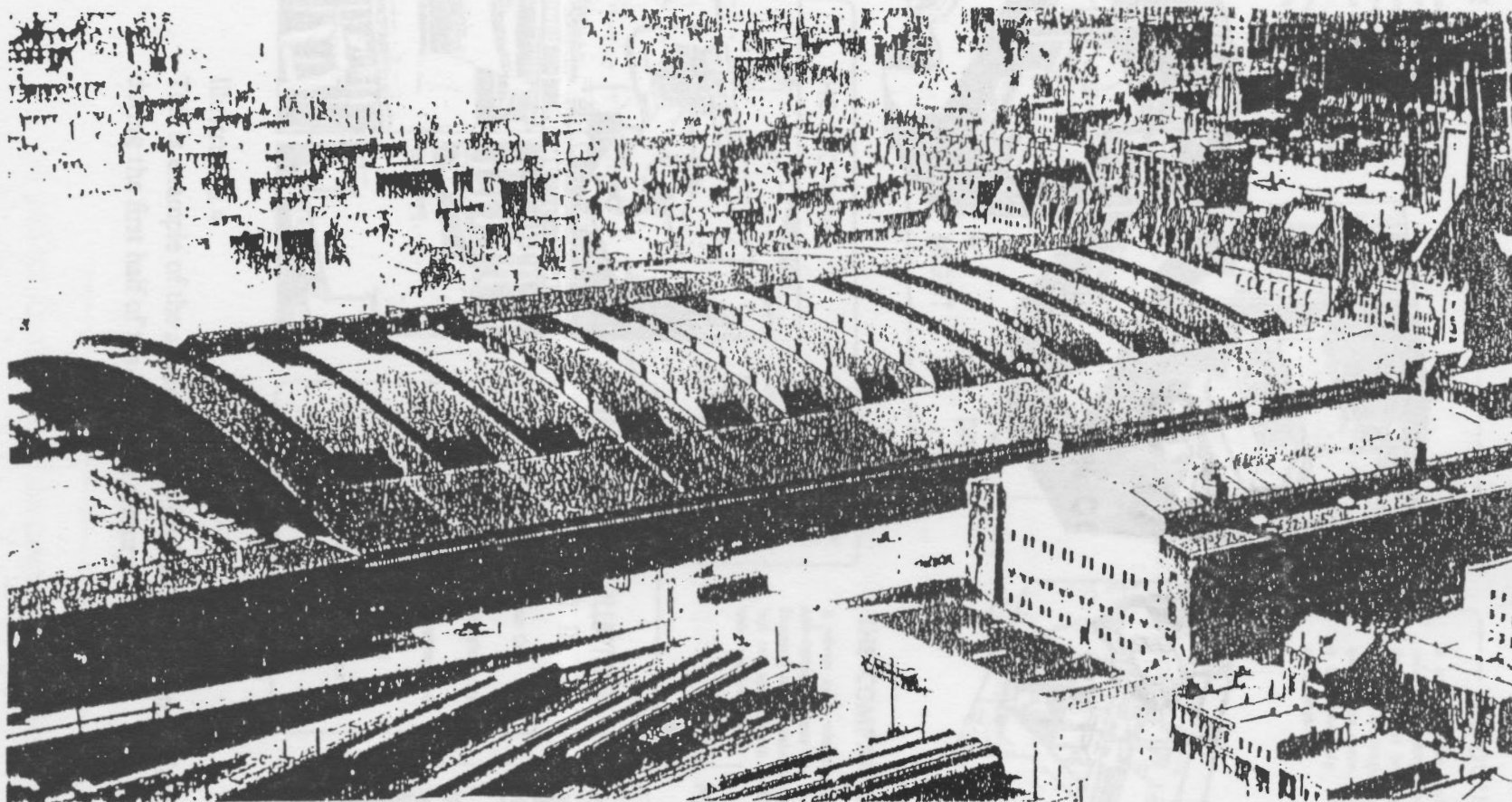


Illustration 3

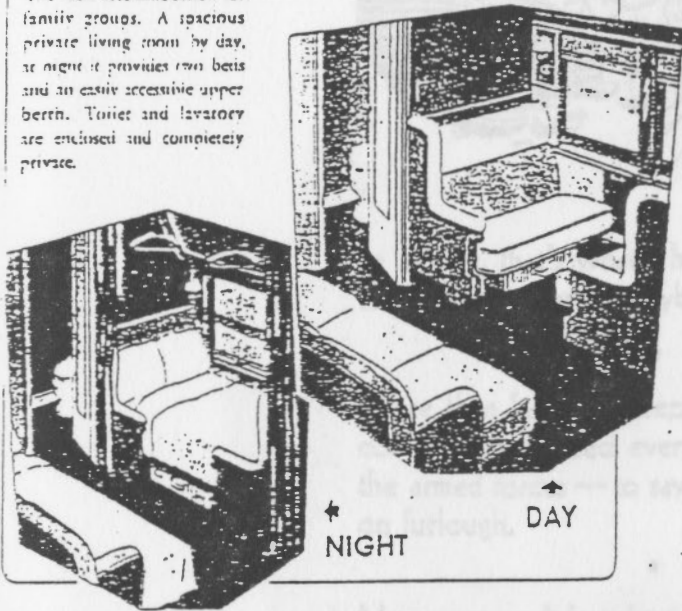
This is an overview of St. Louis Union Station, as shown in the *Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis Historical and Technical Society, Inc.* newsletter, and taken from the Wayne Leeman Collection.

The Missouri Pacific Lines Offer You A Selection of Pullman Accommodations

On Trains Other Than The Streamlined Eagles

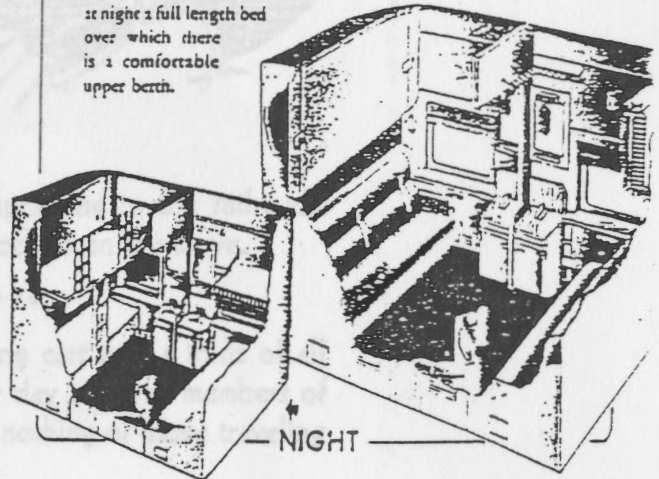
THE DRAWING ROOM

The ideal accommodation for family groups. A spacious private living room by day, at night it provides two berths and an easily accessible upper berth. Toilet and lavatory are enclosed and completely private.



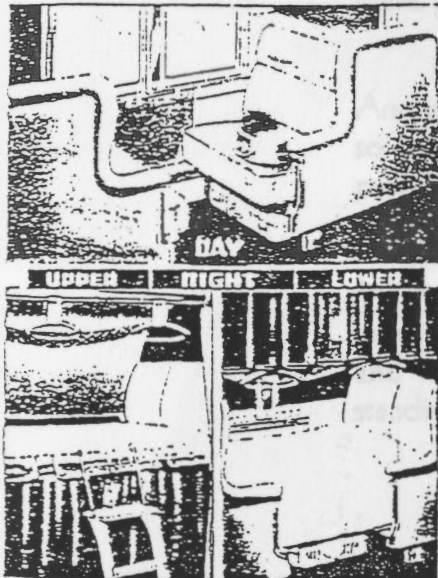
THE DOUBLE BEDROOM

A private room with individual toilet and lavatory. Roomy sofa for daytime travel becomes at night a full length bed over which there is a comfortable upper berth.



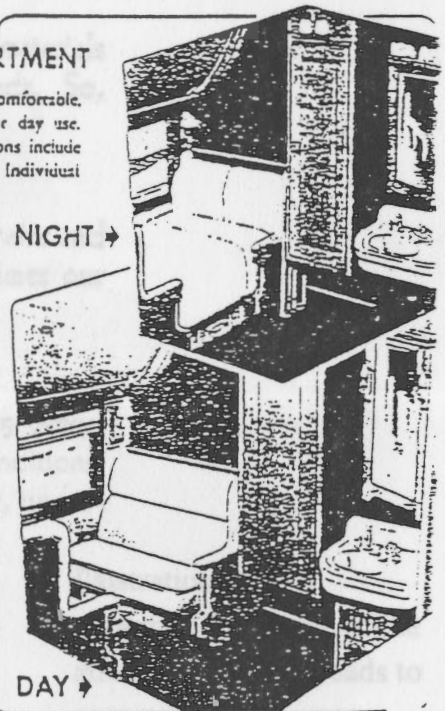
THE SECTION

Includes upper and lower berths, both providing a comfortable, sleep-inducing bed. In daytime, section offers two continuous, soft-cushioned reserved seats.



THE COMPARTMENT

A private room with comfortable, soft-cushioned seats for day use. Sleeping accommodations include bed and upper berth. Individual toilet and lavatory.



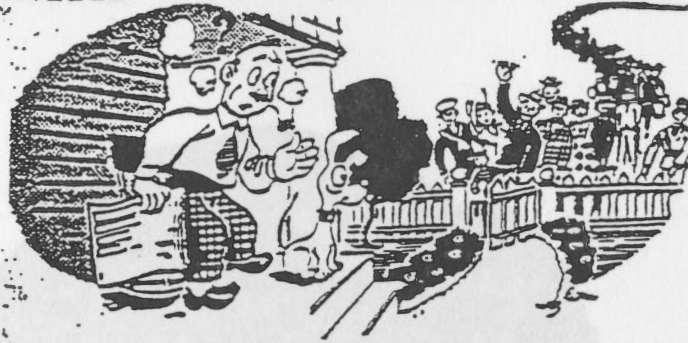
ACCOMMODATIONS ILLUSTRATED ARE PROVIDED IN

- 12 Section, 1 Drawing Room Cars
-
- 10 Section, 1 Drawing Room, 2 Compartment Cars
-
- 8 Section, 1 Drawing Room, 2 Compartment Cars
-
- 3 Section, 5 Double Bedroom Cars
-
- 3 Section, 1 Drawing Room, 3 Double Bedroom Cars
-

Illustration 4

This is example of the advertisements for Pullman accommodations aboard cross-country trains during the first half of the twentieth century.

Supposing
**ALL YOUR FRIENDS
CALLED ON YOU AT THE SAME TIME!**



In a way, that's what's happening to the railroads.
It looks like nearly everybody is on the move.

* * *

More than half the sleeping cars and a third of all
coaches are needed every day to move members of
the armed forces — to say nothing of those traveling
on furlough.

* * *

More cars can't be obtained now because materials
for their construction must go into war needs. So,
there aren't always enough berths or seats!

* * *

And we're handling so many special troop trains and
so many extra war-freight trains that sometimes our
passenger trains are delayed.

* * *

Most of our patrons know that we're doing every-
thing we can to overcome these wartime conditions,
and we're mighty grateful for their patience, under-
standing and cooperation.



Now, More Than Ever, "A Service Institution"

Illustration 5

A perfect illustration of the
attempts by the railroads to
accommodate everyone
who traveled by train
during World War II

A perfect illustration of the attempts by the railroads to accommodate
everyone who traveled during World War II.



Illustration 6

Lois Allene Ledford Bruce, photographed around 1940.



Illustration 7

Gwendolyn Bruce at six months of age.

Illustration 8

Florence Esterine Noyes-Burroughs Ledford with her husband, Joseph, and their seven children. William Lancaster, Maria's father is in the egg.



Illustration 8

Florence Esterlee Nightengale Borroughs Ledford with her husband, Joseph ,
and their seven children; William Lancaster, Mama's father is at the top.



Illustration 9

Four Ledford brothers of Steele, Missouri; William Lancaster (Doc) is not pictured. Counter-clockwise from lower left: Ozell, Samuel, Jess, and Carmie. Probably taken in the late 1930's.



Illustration 10
Mattie Ophelia Latimer as a young girl, pictured
with her father, David Latimer, around 1908.



Illustration 11
Alexander Latimer, a tintype taken
before the Civil War. He was shot
off his horse while on a visit home
from the Civil War. His widow, Sarah,
wore the picture in a cameo locket
around her neck until her death.

Illustration 13
Mama, at sixteen years of age,
with Dad, nineteen years of age,
in 1933

Illustration 12
The gravesite of Alexander Latimer in
Union City, Tennessee.





Illustration 13
Claude Jonathan Bruce,
my grandfather, probably
taken during the 1920's.



Illustration 15
Mama, at sixteen years of age,
with Dad, nineteen years of age,
in 1933.



Illustration 14
Creston Jonathan Bruce,
my father, taken during
the late 1930's.

Illustration 17
Claude and Clara Kerley Bruce,
in 1911, ready for train travel
after their wedding.

Illustration 16

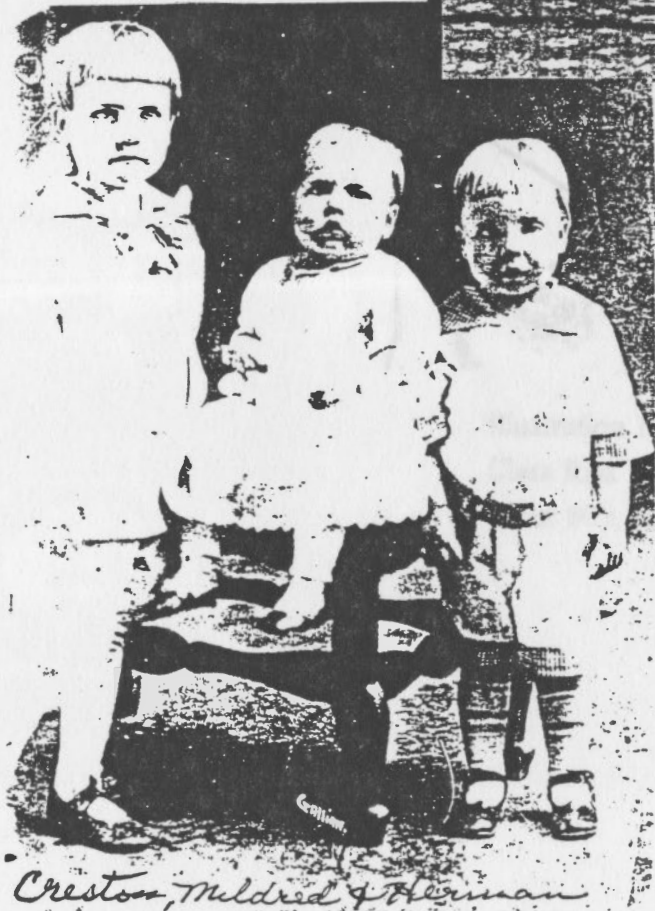
Claude and Clara Kersey Bruce
on their wedding day in 1911.



Illustration 18

Claude and Clara's three oldest children,
photographed around 1917.

From left: Creston, Mildred, and Herman.



Creston, Mildred & Herman



Illustration 17

Claude and Clara Kersey Bruce,
in 1911, ready for train travel
after their wedding.



Illustration 19

Clara Risk Kersey Bruce, photographed
in her 80's, sometime in the late 1960's.



Illustration 20

Clara Bruce with her grown children and first grandchild, Mark, in 1942. Bottom row, from left: Creston, Clara holding Mark, Herman. Top row, from left: Allene, Creston's wife, Parker, Mildred, Harold, and Herman's first wife (name unknown) .

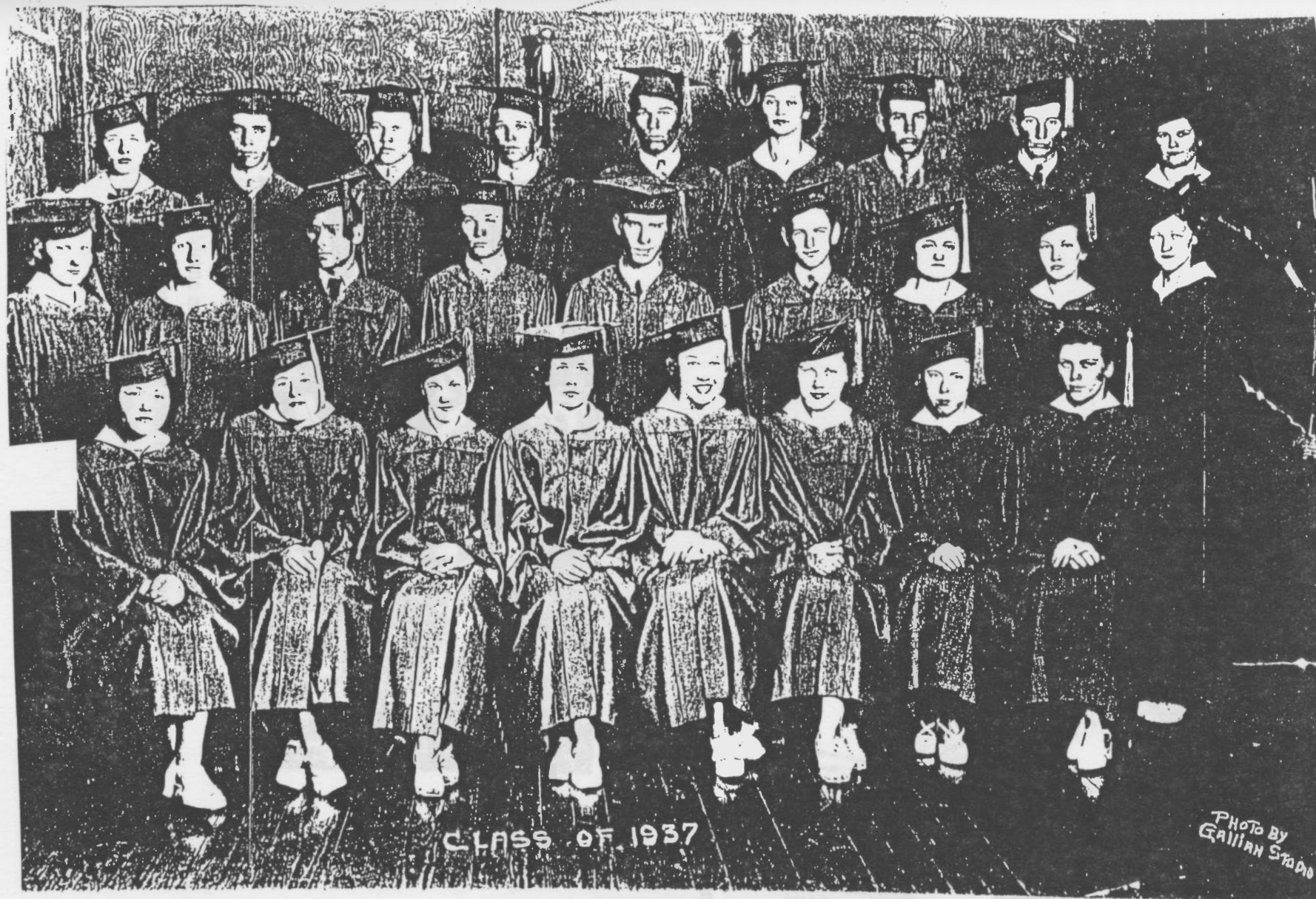


Illustration 21

Allene Ledford (Mama) pictured with her Steele, Missouri, graduation class in 1937.
 She is seated in the bottom row, far left.



Illustration 23
Another picture of Mama, taken
after their move to Michigan in 1944.



Illustration 22
Mama and Dad pictured with her youngest brother
Joe shortly after their marriage in 1938.
Joe lived with them for about three years.

Illustration 24

Left: Creston Bruce on Saipan in 1945.

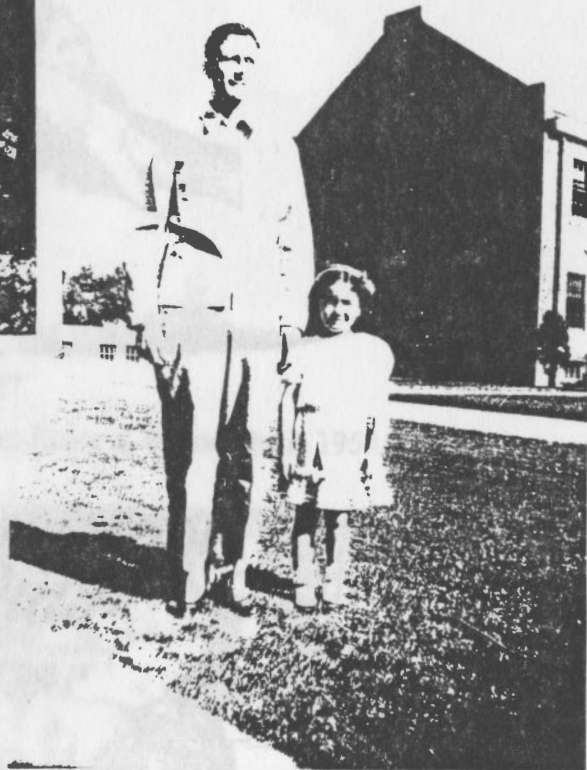


Illustration 25

Gwen Bruce with her dad, Creston Bruce in Grand Haven, Michigan after his return from the Pacific in 1946.



Illustration 26

Left: Mama and Dad with daughter Gwen in Grand Haven, Michigan - taken before he left for the Pacific.



Illustration 27

Gary Jonathan Bruce at six months in 1954.

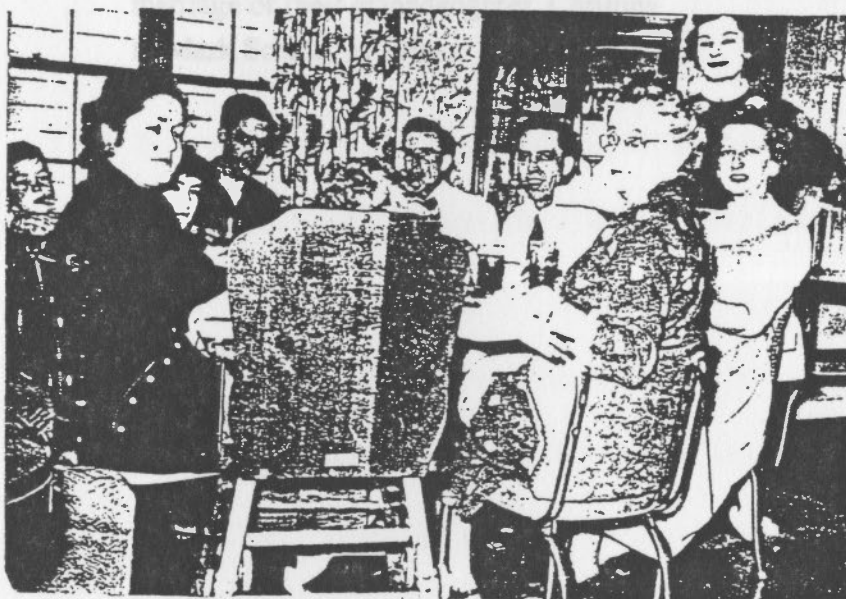


Illustration 28

Members of the Bruce family at dinner at Harold and Virginia Bruce's house in Caruthersville, Missouri, in 1954.



Illustration 29

Creston and Allene Bruce (Mama and Dad)
dancing at the reception following the
marriage of their granddaughter, Christine
to Mark Schlutt, in 1994..

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PROFESSIONAL VITA

GWENDOLYN BRUCE MCLEAN
Indiana University South Bend

EDUCATION

Indiana University South Bend

Master of Liberal Studies Degree, 1998.

Fulfilled required courses in humanities, social sciences and science. Completed elective courses in education and history. The thesis an oral history entitled "Mama's Journey Home: A Daughter's Story," completes the degree.

Western Michigan University

Bachelor of Arts with majors in English and speech, minor in history. 1965.

EXPERIENCE

Indiana University South Bend, Spring 1991-

Faculty, Division of the Arts. Instructor for the S121 Public Speaking course in South Bend and at the Elkhart site. The course introduces the college student to the principles and skills of effective and satisfying public communication.

In 1995, contributed to the S121 committee's revision of the course; served as advisory instructor during course's on-going stages of reformatting and refinement.

Associate Faculty, Division of the Arts. Instructor for S223 Business and Professional Communication and for S122 Interpersonal Communication.

1999- Associate Faculty, School of Education. Instructor for U205 Threshold course.

Holy Cross College, South Bend, IN, Fall 1999-

Instructor for the Speech 101 Public Speaking course.

Southwestern Michigan College, Dowagiac, Michigan, Fall 1997-

Instructor for Public Speaking and Human Communications courses.

Ivy Tech State College, Elkhart, Indiana, Fall 1996.

Instructor for basic writing course.